

Vatican, China clash over bishop's ordination

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HONG KONG (RNS/ENInews) Vatican and Hong Kong cardinals criticized the official Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association for organizing the ordination of a Catholic bishop in northeastern China without Vatican approval.

On Wednesday (Nov. 24), the Vatican called the ordination a grave violation of the freedom of religion after the state-approved Catholic Church ordained the bishop without the prior approval of Pope Benedict XVI.

The Rev. Joseph Guo Jincui was ordained Nov. 20 amid tight security at the Pingquan church in Chengde city. Beijing and the Vatican have clashed repeatedly over who has the authority to ordain bishops, with China insisting on no "foreign interference" in the life of the Chinese church.

Under a tacit agreement worked out in recent years, the state church would retain the power to name bishops as long as the names are first submitted to the Vatican for review and approval.

"Various bishops were subjected to pressures and restrictions on their freedom of movement, with the aim of forcing them to participate and confer the episcopal ordination," the Vatican said. "Such constraints, carried out by Chinese government and security authorities,

constitute a grave violation of freedom of religion and conscience."

Eight Catholic bishops concelebrated the ordinations, and at least two of them were reported to have been forced to join the ceremony.

The Vatican said it had communicated its opposition to Guo's ordination in advance to Beijing but Chinese authorities proceeded unilaterally.

"It offends the Holy Father, the church in China and the universal church, and further complicates the present pastoral difficulties," said the Vatican statement.

Retired Hong Kong Cardinal Joseph Zen, who attended a recent meeting at the Vatican from, said that the ordination involved "the kidnapping of persons, the cutting of all communication, the huge display of police force as if dealing with dangerous criminals."

In Beijing, Liu Bainain, the vice-president of the state-sanctioned Catholic church, denied that bishops had been forced to join the ordination, saying accusations of coercion came from those with "political motives."