

100 held in police torture cover-up

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ABOUT 100 mainland Christians in a village in the central province of Shaanxi have been detained by police in what appears to be an attempt to cover up the brutal persecution of five Christians in March, which resulted in one death.

One of the five victims from Ankang county has written a detailed account of how the police attacked the group at a religious gathering in Taoyuan village, Xunyang county, on March 27.

Three Christians from neighbouring Henan province who knew of the incident were interviewed by a Hongkong church official, who helped to smuggle the letter and some pictures of the victims out of the country.

The 30-minute interview was videotaped, but the names of the victims have not been disclosed.

In her four-page letter, one victim wrote: "This is an immoral, illegal and shameful matter that will shock and astound anyone hearing about it."

One man, identified as Mr Lai Manping, 22, died as a result of the injuries inflicted by the police, she said.

She recalled that their religious meeting was interrupted by eight or nine officers.

Without any explanation, the officers began to beat the participants with rods and handcuffed the five from Ankang.

The three men were forced to remove their trousers.

The officers beat them and then forced the other 26 Christians to

administer 100 blows with bamboo rods to each of the three.

"The three were beaten until they were totally covered with blood, gaping wounds and injuries all over their bodies.

"They did this until they were unconscious and barely breathing. We could only hear the sound of the beating and the cursing of the officers," she wrote.

"In addition to violently beating us [the two women], they deliber-

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ately pushed us on to the three men while the officers were shouting vulgar language at them. We collapsed."

The two women tried to escape but were pulled back into the room.

"They ripped our clothes ... abused us terribly and used the most cruel methods to beat our private parts."

The victim said they were later sent to Taoyuan police station, 30 kilometres away, and were then taken to the Public Security Bureau in Lijia.

Public Security officials in Lijia refused to accept them because of their severe injuries, she said.

The five were then sent back to Taoyuan where they were detained for eight days.

During the detention, a woman doctor was called in

to provide medical treatment after officers found that Mr Lai had suffered serious injuries.

She said the officers decided to free the five because of fears of more trouble.

Mr Lai died while crawling home.

His body was found on the roadside by his family, who started making inquiries at the Xunyang Public Security Bureau.

An autopsy conducted by the police certified that Mr Lai died of an illness, the victim said.

She claimed that police then starting a search for Christians in the area to cover up the incident.

"A few dozen Christians have already been detained," she said.

According to a mainland Christian interviewed in the videotape, the Ankang five were targeted because secu-

rity authorities in Taoyuan were fearful of their connections with foreigners.

Church sources said Ankang had an underground Christian population of about 10,000 and had frequent contacts with foreign Christian bodies through Henan province.

"They are now arresting all the Christians in Taoyuan because they want to stop the news from spreading," said one of the interviewees. "They knew what they did was illegal."

According to church sources, the persecution and "murder" of Mr Lai was not an isolated incident, but related to the Chinese Government's policy of preventing "peaceful evolution".

Several Ankang leaders have been jailed for receiving copies of the Bible from Henan.