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Written statement* submitted by Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

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Unabated Religious Persecution and the Danger of an Escalation — A Case Study on 20 Years of Persecution of Falun Gong in China

Over the last 14 years the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has received critical information on the religious persecution in China through several United Nations Reports on (2000 - 2010) Violations against Falun Gong Practitioners and the Human Rights Situation in China. The independent NGO Doctors Against Forced Organ Harvesting has over a period of 6 years brought to the attention of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights the existence of organ harvesting of Falun Gong and other religious minorities in China and through its global petition gathered the support of over 3 million signatures of world citizens against Organ harvesting in China. In 2018, the People's Republic of China Tribunal, a people's tribunal initiated by citizens to investigate a range of human rights abuses has investigated the evidence of forced organ harvesting and concluded: "The Tribunal's members are certain – unanimously, and sure beyond reasonable doubt – that in People's Republic of China forced organ harvesting from prisoners of conscience has been practiced for a substantial period of time involving a very substantial number of victims."

Such abuses amount to crimes against humanity. However, if observations suggest that these practices are aimed at members of the same religious group, then we need to ask further questions: is there intent to weaponize the medical discipline of transplantation for the purpose to destroy the group. Article II of the Rome Statute recognizes genocide if members of a religious group are killed, or their bodies seriously harmed, with the intent to destroy the group in whole or in part.

Falun Gong is a peaceful Buddha-Qigong cultivation practice introduced in China in 1992. In the Western hemisphere, the practice is also considered a religion. It is based on the universal principles of truthfulness, compassion and tolerance and includes the daily practice of five simple Qigong-like exercises. Soon after its start in 1992, the Falun Gong practice became very popular with 70-100 million practitioners in China.

After the Guangming Daily published an editorial that arbitrarily slandered Falun Gong on June 17, 1996, the Propaganda Ministry issued an internal order on July 4, 1996, to forbid the publication of Falun Gong books. From the past we know that whenever books are burned and destroyed, it should trigger our attention.

Later, in July 1998, the Police Ministry's First Bureau, which is responsible for political security, issued the Policy 1998-555. Under the title "Notice on Launching an Investigation into Falun Gong", this policy labelled Falun Gong without having any evidence falsely as a "cult" and ordered subordinate officers to find and identify any evidence that would support this claim. Launching such investigation in communist China equated to launching a persecution. The framing as a "cult" before evidence was collected, indicated the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s agenda. The religious persecution of Falun Gong began on quiet soles.

What is often missed in the context of hate propaganda and state-directed misinformation campaigns is that not only the ostracized group of people is victimized, but the entire populace. By creating falsified news reports and misinformation about Falun Gong, the Chinese people have been deprived of their freedom to learn about the true, peaceful elements of Falun Gong. The religious persecution in its essence does not only deprive the religious adherents of their freedom to practice their faith, but all Chinese people were deprived of their freedom to learn and practice Falun Gong.

In April 1999, after defamation by a local newspaper, Falun Gong practitioners sought to rectify the false reporting. After armed police incarcerated 45 of them, practitioners asked for their release, and the police replied they should go to the Appeals Office in Zhongnanhai in Beijing.

Spontaneously, by word of mouth, several thousand practitioners from different regions joined and converged at the appeals office in Beijing. Once they have arrived the police suggested that they should spread out along the street across from the office. The practitioners

abided by the instructions and stood in line around the building. However, later, the propaganda ministry has framed this waiting line as a “large-scale demonstration” of Falun Gong, thereby fabricating a label that would later be used to justify their persecution. It has been completely omitted that the so-called “demonstration” occurred per request of the local police. This incident should remind us that fake reporting by news media and subsequent framing by official institutions can be the alarm signal for an imminent religious persecution.

Based on this fabricated demonstration at Zhongnanhai, the former Secretary General Jiang Zemin stated on April 25th, 1999, that the Falun Gong movement represented an ideological threat to the Communist Party and should be rapidly destroyed in fear of losing power over the Chinese people. He wrote in a letter, “Can the Marxism, Materialism, and Atheism that we Communists have really not win over the teaching that Falun Gong advocates? If that were true, it would be a real joke!”

Shortly afterwards, on July 20th, 1999 Falun Gong was officially banned and leading Falun Gong practitioners were arrested across China. All media outlets and television reports in China began to announce the ban 24 hours a day. The crackdown on Falun Gong was supposed to suppress the practice in three months, using harassment and defamatory propaganda to dissuade Falun Gong practitioners and make them abandon their faith. But after three months, Falun Gong was still not eradicated. Then in November 1999, Luo Gan announced to over 3000 police members a new “hard hitting” plan to completely eradicate Falun Gong from China.

More intense measures of persecution, such as brain washing and torture, were proposed. Torture deaths were authorised and framed as the “inmate has committed suicide”. The lack of retribution for these crimes opened the door to any form of abuse that the police wished to inflict. Financial or political incentives to “transform or eliminate” as many Falun Gong practitioners as possible led the police to go beyond what is legally allowed in Chinese prisons. Once the respect for human dignity got lost, it took only a little step to cross the borderline between religious persecution and policy-motivated killing. But instead of simply torturing practitioners to death, greed kicked in, and the practice of forcibly harvesting organs not only from executed prisoners but also from living Falun Gong prisoners of conscience began.

Tens of thousands of blood tests and medical exams were forced upon detained Falun Gong practitioners. Other criminals and inmates were not subject to systematic medical exams and blood testing. This is the point where the religious persecution of Falun Gong escalates. Falun Gong was the target, and conducting systematic, widespread medical exams and blood testing expressed intent.

In 2018, academic researchers revisited the persecution of Falun Gong and found that it meets the criteria of a cold, slow-moving genocide. Falun Gong is targeted as a group, as expressed in the purpose of the 610 Office. Past remarks of leaders of the Chinese Communist Party have stated that they intend to destroy and eradicate Falun Gong, and the actions by the Chinese state leave no doubt that eradicating Falun Gong by all means is a goal for the CCP. The practice of forced organ harvesting is an instrument to achieve that goal.

After the Student massacre in 1989, the world has reacted in dismay so cracking down on Falun Gong in plain daylight was not an option. Instead a steady, concealed, and invisible eradication of Falun Gong practitioners, spreading out the killing over more than 20 years, also achieved the effect of a genocide. So what started as a religious persecution on quiet soles has escalated into nothing less than crimes against humanity or even a genocide.

What do we have to learn from 20 years of persecution of Falun Gong?

- Calling for religious freedom, the right to freely practice one’s faith, is essential for our civilization, as it not only equips the members of a religion to freely practice their own faith, but also allows others to learn and possibly start practicing the respective faith. In any case, we must not watch like detached bystanders when religious persecution unfolds and potentially escalates into genocide.
- Religious freedom is an expression of tolerance and living in peace. The Chinese Communist Party has demonstrated the opposite of tolerance and religious freedom.

The CCP only allows one belief system, and that is to solely deifying the Communist Party. As atheist, anti-faith party the CCP is committed to eradicate any faith including Tibetan Buddhism, Christianity and Falun Gong.

- Calling upon the Chinese government to reinstate the religious freedom as defined in Article 18¹ of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Doctors Against Forced Organ Harvesting, an NGO without consultative status, also shares the views expressed in this statement.

¹ Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.