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Chinese cardinal starts hunger strike

by Catholic News Service

HONG KONG -- Chinese Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kium launched a hunger strike protesting a court decision on educational reform that threatens the management of Catholic schools.

Cardinal Zen, retired bishop of Hong Kong, began the three-day hunger strike Wednesday and said he would consume only water and communion until Saturday.

In 2004, the Chinese government implemented the "Amended Education Ordinance," which requires government-aided schools to form management committees, according to the Asia church news agency, UCA News.

The Hong Kong Catholic diocese appealed the ordinance, saying that the committees could lead to increased government control and jeopardize the mission and autonomy of Catholic schools by infringing on their right to manage their own schools.

In the appeal, the diocese asked that Catholic schools be excluded from the committees. The court delivered its final ruling last week, rejecting the appeal.

Cardinal Zen said the ordinance refutes constitutional law, "which guarantees religious organizations' right to run schools according to practices in place prior to the handover of Hong Kong from the U.K. in 1997" to China, UCA News reported.

Cardinal Zen said he feared that if the church could not properly manage their schools according to its mission and vision, it might be forced to give up operating these schools completely.

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