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CHINA

LABOUR ACTIVIST HELD INCOMMUNICADO

Wei Zhili was transferred to secret incommunicado detention on 20 April 2019. Under this form of detention, he is at risk of torture and other ill-treatment and does not get access to a lawyer of his choice.

Wei Zhili is an editor of “New Generation” (xinshengdai) a website which monitors and reports on internal migrant workers in China. Police took him and another colleague away on 20 March amid a crackdown on students and activists advocating for workers’ rights. They produced no arrest or search warrant while they were searching his home in Guangzhou and questioning him before his arrest.

On 27 March, Shenzhen City Ping Shan Public Security Sub-bureau informed Wei’s families that he was criminally detained on suspicion of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” in Shenzhen City No. 2 detention centre. The detention authorities allowed Wei to meet his family-appointed lawyers on 28 March, 8 April and 18 April. In one of the visits, Wei Zhili told his lawyer that he had not been tortured, but the police had verbally humiliated him and threatened that they would bring his family to the interrogation room if he continued to “refuse cooperation with them.”



Wei Zhili © Private

However, on 20 April, police informed Wei’s parents that, since 19 April, Wei had been put under residential surveillance at a designated location. This is a form of secret incommunicado detention that allows police to hold individuals for up to six months outside the formal detention system. Individuals placed under this form of detention would have no access to legal counsel of their choice, nor to their families. They would also be subject to a grave risk of torture and other ill-treatment. The police asked Wei’s parents to dismiss their lawyers immediately and threatened them if they caused any trouble.

Wei Zhili’s wife, Zheng Churan, who is a well-known feminist activist, has faced continued harassment for merely speaking out publicly about her husband’s detention. Her WeChat accounts, which she used to release information about her husband’s situation, have either been deleted or blocked. In April, her landlord, who has been under police pressure, asked her to leave her rented apartment.

Please send a letter without delay.

- * Ask the director to immediately and unconditionally release Wei Zhili unless there is enough credible and admissible evidence that he has committed an internationally recognized offence and is granted a fair trial in line with international standards.
- * Seek assurances that, until he is free, Wei Zhili is not subjected to any torture or other ill-treatment.
- * Ask the director to ensure that he has regular and unrestricted access to a lawyer of his choice and can communicate with family members without interference unless justified in line with international human rights law.
- * Call on him to end all harassment against Wei Zhili's family.

Write to

Song Yiyang, Director
Pingshan District Public Security Sub-Bureau
1 Longping Lu, Pingshan Qu
Shenzhen, 518118
Guangdong Province
People's Republic of China
Salutation: Dear Director Song

Please copy

His Excellency Shaye Lu
Ambassador for the People's Republic of China
515 St. Patrick Street
Ottawa
Ontario K1N 5H3
Fax: 613 789 1911
Phone: 613 789 3434 or 613 762 3769

Additional information

Wei Zhili is an editor of "New Generation" (xinshengdai), a website on monitoring and reporting the situation of rural migrant workers in China. New Generation also uses other mainland Chinese social media platforms to disseminate information about employment and labour laws and occupational safety and health. A lot of his recent work was focused on the plight of the workers from Hunan province who contracted silicosis due to lack of occupational health safety protection in the factories.

Wei Zhili has been committed to labour rights and feminist issues since he graduated from university in 2010. Upon graduation, he worked in Hand-in-Hand Workers' Activity Centre (手牵手工友活动室) in Shenzhen providing legal advice, representation and organizing support to workers. A blog by Tian Yu, who had tried to commit suicide while working at Foxconn, recalled that Wei Zhili was so attentive and kind and that he and a group of students had supported and accompanied her and her family to get through the hardest time of her life. Wei Zhili was also previously threatened by police about his work on labour issues. In that incident, police reportedly told him and other labour activists that labour activism is "disturbing social order" and "speaking for workers is anti-Communist and counter-revolution".

Activists and human rights defenders continue to be systematically subjected to monitoring, harassment, intimidation, arrest and arbitrary detention. Police hold an increasing number of human rights defenders outside of formal detention facilities, sometimes without access to a lawyer for long periods, exposing the detainees to the risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

Since July 2018, China has arbitrarily detained and questioned dozens of student organizers, labour rights activists and factory workers in at least five cities in what appears to be intensified repression against the emerging labour movement in the country.

Over the years, China has made further efforts to reinforce its already oppressive internet censorship architecture. Thousands of websites and social media services are forced to censor their content, while some platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are blocked. In addition, several citizen journalists and directors of local news outlets that publicize articles and information about human rights incidents in China have been detained and imprisoned.