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CHINA

LABOUR ACTIVISTS HELD IN SECRET DETENTION

Wei Zhili and **Ke Chengbing**, both editors of the labour rights news and advocacy website “New Generation” (xinshengdai), have been held in incommunicado detention since March 2019. Their detention comes amid a crackdown across China on students and activists advocating for workers’ rights. They have been denied access to a lawyer of their choice and to their family. They are at grave risk of torture and other ill-treatment.



Wei Zhili and Ke Chengbing were first taken away from their homes by police on 20 March 2019. Prior to their detention, the activists used the online platform “New Generation” (xinshengdai) to publish information about cases of migrant workers from Hunan Province who had contracted occupational lung disease. They had also helped the workers to defend their rights and lodge labour rights complaints to the authorities.

via Twitter

On 26 and 27 March, Shenzhen City Ping Shan Public Security Sub-bureau informed the families that Wei and Ke were criminally detained on suspicion of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” in Shenzhen City No. 2 detention centre. Three weeks later however, the police notified the family that they had been transferred to residential surveillance at a designated location.

Family members of the two activists have been facing pressure from the police to dismiss their lawyers and remain silent about their cases. Wei Zhili’s wife, Zheng Churan, is a well-known feminist activist who has relentlessly campaigned for Wei’s release. Facing continued harassment, Zheng’s WeChat accounts have been deleted and she has been evicted by her landlord.

Please send an email or letter to the Director of the Public Security Sub-Bureau.

- * Seek the release of Wei Zhili and Ke Chengbing without delay or conditions on their freedom unless there is enough credible and admissible evidence that they have committed an internationally recognized offense and are granted a fair trial in line with international standards.
- * Insist that, throughout their detention, Wei Zhili and Ke Chengbing are free from the threat of torture or other ill-treatment.
- * Ask him to provide regular and unrestricted access to a lawyer of their choice and facilitate communication with family members, all without interference unless justified in line with international human rights law.
- * Call on him to end all harassment against family members of Wei Zhili and Ke Chengbing.

Write to

Song Yiyang, Director
Shenzhen City Pingshan District Public Security Sub-Bureau
1 Longping Lu, Pingshan Qu
Shenzhen 518118
People's Republic of China
Email: shenzhendaily@szpsq.gov.cn
Salutation: Dear Director Song

Please copy

Ms. Mingjian Chen
Chargé d'Affaires, Embassy of the People's Republic of China
515 St. Patrick Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 5H3
Email: chineseembassy.ca@gmail.com
Fax: 613 789 1911
Phone: 613 789 3434 or 613 762 3769

Additional information

Wei Zhili and Ke Chengbing are editors 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. Much of their 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 2001. Upon his university 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, a subsidiary of Taiwan's Hon Hai Precision Industry Company, the world's largest "contract manufacturer", 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".

Ke Chengbing aka "Laomu" (Old Wood) is one of the founders of "New Generation" (xinshengdai) and has worked for the organization since then. He graduated in 2012 from Jinan University, where he has been active in grassroots human rights movement as a student activist. After graduation, he committed to worker's rights issues in South China, conducting investigative research on working conditions in Foxconn after a series of suicides of its employees.

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.