

UA 67/19

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## CHINA

### ACTIVIST HELD INCOMMUNICADO FOR MONTHS

Yang Zhengjun, a prominent workers' rights activist, was taken into custody in Guangzhou on 8 January 2019 and has been held incommunicado since then. He is the editor-in-chief of iLabour.net / "New Generation" (Xinshengdai), an independent website covering workers' rights stories. His detention is believed to be a part of a nation-wide crackdown targeting workers and students as well as activists supporting workers' rights and freedom of speech on university campuses. With no access to his family, or a family lawyer, there are grave concerns for his mental and physical wellbeing.



*via Twitter*

More than a month after he was taken away, the Pingshan District Public Security Sub-bureau notified Yang Zhengjun's family that he had been put under "Residential Surveillance at a Designated Location" for "picking quarrels and provoking troubles". While police told his wife that Yang Zhengjun was detained in Dapeng District in Shenzhen City, other lawyers said they had seen Yang in Shenzhen City No.2 Detention Centre. There is no way to verify Yang's whereabouts, nor his wellbeing, as all requests by his wife and lawyer to meet him have been rejected.

Yang Zhengjun's wife has faced continuous harassment since her husband was detained. She says she has been asked numerous times by the police to convince Yang to plead guilty. In March 2019, after a request by the police, their landlord did not renew the lease of their family home. As a result, Yang's wife, who was five months pregnant at the time, was forced to find somewhere new to live by herself.

Amnesty International is concerned by the consistent use of "Residential Surveillance at a Designated Location" to curb the activities of human rights defenders, including lawyers, activists and religious practitioners. When held without access to legal counsel of their choice, their families or others, individuals are at real risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

#### **Please send an email or letter to the Director of the Public Security Sub-bureau.**

- \* Urge him to arrange to the immediate and unconditional release of Yang Zhengjun, unless there is sufficient credible and admissible evidence that he has committed an internationally recognized offense and is granted a fair trial in line with international standards.
- \* Seek assurances that, while he remains in custody, Yang Zhengjun is not subjected to any torture or other ill-treatment.
- \* Ask him to provide regular and unrestricted access to a lawyer of his choice and to family members without interference unless justified in line with international human rights law.
- \* Call on him to bring to an end all harassment against Yang Zhengjun's family.

**Write to**

Song Yiyang, Director  
Shenzhen City Pingshan District Public Security Sub-bureau  
1 Longping Lu, Pingshan Qu  
Dagongye Qu  
Shenzhen Shi 518118  
People's Republic of China  
Email: [shenzhendaily@szpsq.gov.cn](mailto:shenzhendaily@szpsq.gov.cn)  
Salutation: Dear Director

**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](mailto:chineseembassy.ca@gmail.com)  
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**Additional information**

Yang Zhengjun has a master's degree graduate from Minzu University of China, Beijing. He works tirelessly to defend the rights of workers suffering from pneumoconiosis, a disease of the lungs due to inhalation of dust. Along with Wei Zhili and Ke Chengbing, he ran iLabour.net, a website that promotes workers' rights, disseminates information about labour laws, and covers workers-related stories. After Yang's detention, Wei and Ke were also detained in March and subsequently put under Residential Surveillance at a Designated Location" with the same charge in April 2019. "Residential surveillance in a designated location" is a measure that, under certain circumstances, enables criminal investigators to hold individuals for up to six months outside the formal detention system in what can amount to a form of secret incommunicado detention.

The detention of the three editors is part of a nation-wide crackdown targeting workers, students and activists supporting workers' rights and freedom of speech on university campuses. It first started in July 2018, when 30 workers from Jasic Technology Co Ltd, a Shenzhen-based private welding equipment manufacturer, tried to form their own union. The protests received support from university students across the country. Police detained the peaceful protesters and their supporters on 27 July 2018. Following the first wave of arrests in July 2018, more than a dozen labour activists and students supporting the Jasic workers were taken away on 9 November 2018. Among them are graduates from Peking University, one of the most prestigious universities in China. According to media reports, one of the students was beaten up and taken away by a group of people in dark clothing inside the university campus. The security on campus reportedly did nothing to stop the people from beating him and taking him away. The whereabouts of some students remains unknown.

The crackdown also extended to Marxist societies in universities, as they were very active in supporting workers' protests in different parts of the country. On 29 April 2019, five students from the Peking University Marxist Society went missing. One of the missing students Qiu Zhanxuan released a video in early May detailing his experience of being tortured and subjected to other forms of ill treatment while in detention in late April. According to his video, he was slapped by the police until his nose bled. Police also forced him to sign a letter declaring that he gave up his right to receive education. In recent years, China has enacted legislation and regulations to protect workers' rights, but there is poor implementation of these laws. According to China National Bureau of Statistics, only 35 percent of China's 281 million "migrant domestic workers" had labour contracts in 2016. At the same time, independent unions are banned, and the state-run All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) is the only body allowed to represent workers in China. ACFTU-affiliated unions at the enterprise level are often controlled by factory management and have little capacity to protect workers' interests.