

UA 44/22

AI Index ASA 17/5628/2022 of 19 May 2022

CHINA ACTIVISTS CHARGED WITH SUBVERSION

#MeToo activist Sophia Huang Xueqin and labour activist Wang Jianbing went missing on 19 September 2021. Detained under “inciting subversion of state power”, both of their cases are now with Guangzhou City People’s Procuratorate. They were charged for joining weekly private gatherings held at Wang’s house where they discussed challenges faced by activists and civil society in China. Detained solely for practicing their rights to freedom of expression and association, Sophia Huang Xueqin and Wang Jianbing should be released immediately. Pending their release, the authorities must ensure that they are not subject to torture and other ill-treatment and ensure that they have access to family members and lawyers of their choice.

Sophia Huang Xueqin and Wang Jianbing were both arrested in Guangzhou on 19 September 2021 and detained incommunicado for more than 6 months. Wang could only meet with his lawyer for the first time virtually on 1 April 2022. I am also concerned that Sophia Huang still has no access to a lawyer.

According to Wang’s lawyer, Wang was detained alone at Guangzhou City No.1 Detention Centre during the period of “residential surveillance under a designated location” (RSDL) where the conditions were harsh. His basic meals were not regular, and he was subjected to long hours of interrogation. It is believed that Sophia Huang was also subjected to the same ill-treatment during the period when she was detained under RSDL. I find it further worrying that Sophia Huang reportedly significantly lost weight during this period, especially as she only weighed approximately 50kg before she was detained.

Write to the Chief Procurator urging him to:

- release Sophia Huang Xueqin and Wang Jianbing immediately
- pending their release, ensure that Sophia Huang Xueqin and Wang Jianbing have regular, unrestricted access to family and lawyers of their choice and are not subjected to torture and other ill-treatment
- stop harassing, arresting, and threatening other human rights defenders who peacefully exercise their right to freedom of association and other human rights

Write to:

Chief Procurator Zhang Jian
Guangzhou City People’s Procuratorate
66, Huangpu Dadao Xi,
Guangzhou shi, Guangdong Sheng, 510600
People’s Republic of China
Salutation: Dear Chief Procurator Zhang,

And Copy:

His Excellency Peiwu Cong
Ambassador
Embassy of the People's Republic of China
515 St. Patrick Street
Ottawa, ON K1N 5H3
Fax: 613 789 1911
Email: chineseembassy.ca@gmail.com

Additional information

Sophia Huang Xueqin is a journalist who has been involved in several #MeToo campaigns to provide support and assistance to survivors of sexual assault and harassment. She was previously detained between October 2019 and January 2020 and charged with “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” after writing about the 2019 mass protests in Hong Kong.

Labour activist Wang Jianbing (known to friends as “Pancake”) has provided legal support for people with disabilities and workers with occupational diseases. He is also a prominent supporter of the #MeToo movement in China.

Sophia Huang Xueqin and Wang Jianbing were arrested in the Chinese city of Guangzhou on 19 September, the day before Sophia Huang was planning to leave China for the UK to study for a master’s degree at the University of Sussex. Both Sophia Huang and Wang’s family only received the notice of their arrest in October 2021, more than a month after their arrest. It is believed that they were subjected to “residential surveillance at a designated location” (RSDL) (指定居所监视居住) for more than six months without access to their family members and lawyers of their choice prior to being formally detained at Guangzhou City No 1 Detention Centre.

Their detention is believed to be related to the weekly gatherings hosted by Wang at his house. These gatherings had been happening for almost a year before they were arrested. During these gatherings, they discussed the challenges faced by activists under the shrinking space of civil society.

After they were arrested, police raided Wang’s and Sophia Huang’s residences separately. The authorities took away many items including Sophia’s journal. It was also reported that Wang’s Facebook account was logged into by the police. More than 40 activists were questioned by the police after the arrest of Wang and Sophia Huang.

“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. When held without access to legal counsel of their choice, their families or others, suspects placed under this form of “residential surveillance” are at risk of torture and other ill-treatment. This form of detention has been used to curb the activities of human rights defenders, including lawyers, activists and religious practitioners. Activists and human rights defenders continue to be systematically subjected to monitoring, harassment, intimidation, arrest and detention.