

An appeal to all Member States to join the global convention banning the secret abduction or imprisonment of persons has been made by the UN Secretary-General on the fourth *International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances*

In a message on the Day, observed annually on 30 August, Ban Ki-moon denounced the "alarming" number of acts that are tantamount to forced disappearances.

Some men arrive. They force their way into a family's home, rich or poor, house, hovel or hut, in a city or in a village, anywhere. They come at any time of the day or night, usually in plain clothes, sometimes in uniform, always carrying weapons. Giving no reasons, producing no arrest warrant, frequently without saying who they are or on whose authority they are acting, they drag off one or more members of the family towards a car, using violence in the process if necessary.

This is often the first act in the drama of an enforced or involuntary disappearance, a particularly heinous violation of human rights and an international crime.

Nationwide disappearances

Amnesty International reported that there was a nationwide crackdown on human rights lawyers and activists in China in July.

Authorities have targeted lawyers across the country including in Beijing, Guangzhou and Shanghai. With new reports emerging, it is difficult to determine who has been detained by the authorities, or taken in for questioning and who may have simply gone into hiding to avoid possible detention.

"The authorities must end this assault against human rights lawyers. Such an unprecedented nationwide crackdown can only have been sanctioned from within the central government," said William Nee, China Researcher at *Amnesty International*.

"This coordinated attack on lawyers makes a mockery of President Xi Jinping's claims to promote the rule of law. The authorities must immediately and unconditionally release all those detained solely for their work defending human rights."

Open letter

In China, relatives of recently disappeared lawyers wrote an open letter to China's Minister of Public Security:

Honorable Mr. Guo Shengkun (郭盛坤),

We don't know if you will be able to read this letter, but we are writing it regardless in the hope that you may. We do not want to let slip the slightest hope.

Since July 9th, our loved ones have been disappeared, and they include 17 lawyers, their assistants, and law firm staffers, as well as 6 rights defenders. Their disappearances all followed the same pattern: the people who took them away, either in Beijing or Tianjin, claimed that they were "Tianjin police." They were taken away for allegedly "provoking disturbances" or merely for "committing a crime" without any specifics; and following their forced disappearance we have had a hard time to get them lawyers. Lawyers who expressed desire to represent them were visited by security police who threatened them against any involvement.

Those of us who have been able to hire lawyers for our loved ones have seen that when the lawyers attempted to meet their clients according to procedures, the Tianjin police denied that they had taken away our loved one.

When a terrorist attack is perpetrated, a terrorist group will come out and claim responsibility for it. When the police system of the People's Republic of China disappears its citizens, shouldn't it make a statement and say something?

On July 18, our loved ones appeared on CCTV's morning news. We were flabbergasted to find that, while we still hadn't received any written notice about them, they were already found guilty on TV without a trial. Is this a demonstration of "governing the country according to the law" emphasized by our General Secretary Xi?

Finally, as we searched tirelessly for our loved ones, there were words that a task force was in charge of our loved ones and that Tianjin police don't know much about it. We managed to find out their alleged crime (or the vagueness of it), and we were told that an official notice would be delivered to us.

But 50 days have passed since the disappearance of our loved ones. So far, only relatives of 5 lawyers, their assistants and 2 rights activists have received notices from the police, and relatives of the rest of the 16 have received nothing. Where have the notices been sent? Even if they were sent to the hometown addresses on their ID cards, they should have long arrived. Those who received detention notice still don't know where their loved ones are detained, and there is no knowing when they will have access to lawyers. Only one has met with a lawyer once and no more since then.

In short, 23 PRC citizens have been disappeared, some for as long as 50 days by now, and the public security apparatus you head have had no intention to honor our lawful rights to information.

Why? Since China has been flaunting "governing the country according to the law," we wonder: Is the law the government acts on the same as the promulgated law? Words fail to express our anxiety and helplessness.

We wonder: whether it's the high ranking public security officials or the rank and file police officers, don't you have parents, a wife or husband, and children? You don't know what it is like until the same thing happens to you? Forgive me for making such a connection, but it indeed has happened to members of your system.

Families and friends keep asking for news about our loved ones. And the only thing we can tell them is that we have received nothing from the public security.

Outside the gate of the Preliminary Investigation Squad of Tianjin Hexi Detention Center, the two-year-old son of lawyer Wang Quanzhang (王 quantang) asked his mother: "Where is Daddy?" Bao Mengmeng (包 mengmeng), teenager son of lawyer Wang Yu (王 yu) texted her mother's colleagues who have not been disappeared: "When can I see my parents?" The five-year-old daughter of lawyer Li Heping (李 heping) asked, "Why is daddy still not home?"

Faced with these questions from children, we hope you understand how we feel: "We don't even know where they are, let alone when they will come back."

Over the years, Chinese police are known to the world for extracting confessions through torture in the investigation stage. Even though China has long ratified the United Nations Convention Against Torture, we have little faith that the law will protect the safety of our loved ones when the authorities would not even acknowledge their whereabouts.

We grew up watching TV programming extolling the New China. Now we think about it and we cringe: What is this? To tell you the truth: At home we fear even knocks on the door. People at the door who claim to be checking our water meter, delivering a package, fixing water pipes are least likely robbers (if they are we can at least call 110), and most likely someone who is a disguised secret police of the People's Republic of China, and a 110 call wouldn't get you help.

Such fear and panic do not beset these lawyers and their families only; they beset the entire Chinese society.

We look forward to the public security system observing the law when handling cases.

Relatives

1. Wang Qiaoling (王 qiaoling), wife of Li Heping (李 heping)
2. Zhao Fengxia (赵 fengxia), mother of Bao Longjun (包 longjun)
3. Wang Quanxiu (王 quanxiu), older sister of Wang Quanzhang (王 quantang)
4. Li Wenzu (李 wenzu), wife of Wang Quanzhang (王 quantang)
5. Liu Shengxian (刘 shengxian), father of Liu Sixin (刘 sixin)
6. Bi Liping (毕 liping), wife of Li Chunfu (李 chunfu)
7. Xie Yuanfeng (谢 yuanfeng), younger sister of Xie Yuandong (谢 yuandong)
8. You Minglei (游 minglei), husband of Zhao Wei (赵 wei)
9. Gao Liang (高 liang), younger brother of Gao Yue (高 yue)
10. Fan Lili (范 lilili), wife of Ge Ping (葛 ping)
11. Ai Huixin (艾 huixin), mother of Wang Fang (王 fang)

12. Liu Yinchai (刘隐才), mother of Monk Wangyun (王云)

13. Tong Yanchun (Tong 颜春), mother of Wang Yu (王宇)

August 29, 2015, on the eve of the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances (August 30).

List of Lawyers, law staffers, and rights activists who have been disappeared since July 9:

17 lawyers, assistants and law firm staffers:

1. Wang Yu (王宇), Beijing Fengrui Law Firm. Taken away at 4:00 am on July 9, 2015. Held incommunicado for over 50 days already. Placed under “residential surveillance at a designated place” for allegedly “provoking disturbances” and “inciting subversion of state power.”
2. Bao Longjun (鲍龙军), husband of Wang Yu, Beijing. Unreachable since 3:00 am, July 9. Placed under “residential surveillance at a designated place” for allegedly “inciting subversion of state power” and “provoking disturbances.” Police denied lawyers of meeting with Bao on August 28 and was told that Bao is “suspected of the crime of harm the national security.”
3. Wang Quanzhang (王 quantang), Beijing, Fengrui Law Firm. Unreachable since 13:00, July 10, 2015. Criminally detained for allegedly “provoking disturbances” and “inciting subversion of state power.” Home in Beijing searched by Beijing police on August 5.
4. Liu Sixin (刘锡新), administrative assistant at Beijing Fengrui Law Firm. Unreachable since 8:45 am, July 10, 2015. Held in Tianjin Hexi Detention Center for allegedly “provoking disturbances.”
5. Xie Yuandong (谢远东), intern lawyer at Beijing Fengrui Law Firm. Taken away from home on July 10, 2015, and placed under “residential surveillance at a designated place” on the same day.
6. Li Heping (李和平), Beijing. Taken away at 14:00, July 10. Coersive measures used against him.
7. Xie Yanyi (谢彦义), Beijing. Summoned for a talk in the afternoon of July 10, 2015. Taken away in the morning of July 12. Home raided on the same day around noon. Coersive measures used against him.
8. Zhou Shifeng (周时丰), Beijing Fengrui Law Firm. Taken away at 7:30 am, July 10. Criminally detained.
9. Huang Liqun (黄立群), Beijing Fengrui Law Firm. Taken away at 8:30 am, July 10. Criminally detained.
10. Sui Muqing (随穆清), Guangzhou, Guangdong. Taken away at 23:40, July 10, 2015. Placed under “residential surveillance at a designated place” for allegedly “inciting subversion of state power.”
11. Xie Yang (谢阳), Hunan province. Taken away at 5:40 am, July 11. Placed under “residential surveillance at a designated place” for allegedly “disrupting the court” and “inciting subversion of state power.”
12. Professor Chen Taihe (陈台和), Guangxi Autonomous Zone. Criminally detained on July 13, 2015, at Guilin Third Detention Center for allegedly “provoking disturbances.” Lawyer Tan Yongpei (谭永培) met with him once on July 16 but has been denied of meeting since.
13. Zhao Wei (赵伟), a.k.a. Kaola, Beijing, assistant to lawyer Li Heping. Taken away at 17:00 on July 10, 2015. Criminally detained in Tianjin Hexi Detention Center for allegedly “provoking

disturbances.”

14. Gao Yue (高岳), Beijing. Assistant to lawyer Li Heping. Placed under “residential surveillance at a designated place” for allegedly “provoking disturbances” and “inciting subversion of state power.”

15. Li Shuyun (李帅云), Beijing Fengrui Law Firm. Taken away by police at 11:30 on July 10, 2015.

16. Li Chunfu (李春富), Beijing, younger brother of Li Heping. Taken away by Tianjin police around 22:00 on August 1, 2015 and home raided.

17. Wang Fang (王芳), accountant at Beijing Fengrui Law Firm. Unreachable since 8:30, July 10, 2015.

5 Rights Activists:

1. Gou Hongguo (郭洪国), a.k.a. Ge Ping (葛平), Tianjin resident, taken away in Beijing in the morning of July 10, 2015, by Tianjin police. Placed under “residential surveillance at a designated place” for allegedly “provoking disturbances.” On August 24, the authorities changed allegation against him to “inciting subversion of state power.”

2. Liu Yongping (刘永平), a.k.a. Lao Mu (老木), Beijing. Detained on July 10, 2015. Placed under “residential surveillance at a designated place” for allegedly “provoking disturbances.”

3. Hu Shigen (胡世根), Beijing. Disappeared on July 10, 2015.

4. Lin Bin (林斌), a.k.a. Monk Wangyun, Fujian. Taken away around noon on July 10 in Chengdu airport. His temple Jiuxian Zen Temple in Fujian was raided on July 9, and on August 16, his mother was evicted from the temple.

5. Jiang Jianjun (江健军), Dalian, Liaoning. Criminally detained on July 12 for “provoking disturbances” and released after 37 days in custody.

Translated by China Change