

URGENT ACTION

LAWYER SUPPORTING CHURCHES STILL DETAINED

A prominent human rights lawyer has been criminally detained in China after being placed under ‘residential surveillance’ in an unknown location for six months, without access to lawyer or family. He had been providing assistance to activists who are resisting the removal of crosses from churches. His detention is part of a nationwide crackdown against human rights lawyers and activists.

Prominent human rights lawyer **Zhang Kai**, 37, was transferred to Wenzhou Detention Centre under criminal detention on 26 February. He had appeared on Chinese State television the day before, looking thin and exhausted, in a taped “confession” in which he recognized having “violated national laws, disturbed social order, and endangered national security”. It is possible that this “confession” was made under duress. He is being held under suspicion of ‘stealing, spying into, purchasing, or illegally providing state secrets or intelligence’ to foreign actors and ‘disturbing public order’.

Zhang Kai was taken away by police from a church in Wenzhou, Zhejiang province, in south-east China on 25 August 2015. He was placed under ‘residential surveillance’, which allowed the authorities to hold him for up to six months at a location outside the formal detention system, without access to his lawyers and family. His two assistants **Liu Peng** and **Fang Xianguai** were detained at the same time but were released on 11 December.

Zhang Kai had been offering legal support to a number of churches in Zhejiang province after the authorities began demolishing churches and removing crosses and crucifixes in late 2013. According to activists, over 1,500 crosses were torn down and several churches destroyed within a few months, after the demolitions intensified in 2015. Zhang Kai is one of over 200 lawyers and activists that have been targeted as part of a nationwide crackdown that began in July 2015.

Please write immediately in English, Chinese or your own language:

- Demanding the authorities immediately and unconditionally release Zhang Kai;
- Pending his release, urging them to grant Zhang Kai regular, unrestricted access to his family and lawyers, and ensure he is not subjected to torture and other ill-treatment;
- Calling on them to ensure the right to freedom of religion and belief is respected in China, with individuals protected and allowed to practise their faith free from fear, intimidation and attack.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 14 APRIL 2016 TO:

Minister of Public Security
Guo Shengkun
Ministry of Public Security
No. 14, Dong Chang’an Jie
Dongcheng Qu, Beijing 100741
People’s Republic of China
Tel: +86 1066262114 (Chinese only)

Email: gabzfwz@mps.gov.cn

Salutation: Your Excellency

Secretary for State Administration for
Religious Affairs
Wang Zuo’an
Xicheng Qu, Houhai Bei Lu 44 hao
Beijing 100009
People’s Republic of China
Fax: + 86 106409500

Salutation: Your Excellency

Director of Wenzhou City Detention
Centre
Dushancun
Longwangqu, Wenzhou Shi
People’s Republic of China
Tel: + 86 057785980114 (Chinese only)

Salutation: Dear Director

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HIS EXCELLENCY MR LIU XIAOMING, Embassy of the People’s Republic of China, 49-51 Portland Place W1B 1JL, 020 7299 4049, press_uk@mfa.gov.cn

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 190/15. Further information:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa17/2370/2015/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Over 200 human rights lawyers and activists were detained, missing, or brought in for questioning as part of an unprecedented nationwide crackdown which began in July 2015. Thirty people are still in detention or are unaccounted for. At least ten people are being held on suspicion of ‘inciting subversion of state power’, which carries a prison sentence of up to 15 years. The crackdown was accompanied by a smear campaign in state media, with lawyers and activists accused of being part of a criminal operation to ‘undermine social stability’.

Local authorities in Zhejiang province are removing crosses from churches on the pretext of a wider urbanization and beautification campaign targeting illegal structures. However, the removal of over 1,500 crosses led to a series of protests organized by Church activists. This included sit-ins in churches and singing hymns to security officials. Several churches have said they have been subjected to audits and financial reviews, with some pastors detained on suspicion of ‘embezzlement’, after they resisted the removal of crosses.

Zhang Kai was a very important figure in combating the campaign against Christianity in Zhejiang. He published a small booklet to inform people of their rights in trying to defend the Cross (*shi jia weiquan shouce*). He also launched the Protecting the Cross Lawyers Group in July 2015, just after being targeted in the crackdown against human rights lawyers. He was also representing many churches in their legal struggles to defend their rights.

The Chinese government’s crackdown against the Protestant churches has further escalated in recent months.

On 28 January, Gu Yuese, a senior pastor of Chongyi Church in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, was placed under “residential surveillance”, after being removed from his position ten days earlier. His family believe his wife is also in police custody. Gu Yuese publicly opposed a government-sponsored project of removing crosses from churches in Zhejiang province.

On 26 February, pastor Bao Guohua and his wife Xing Wenxiang, also a pastor, from Jinghua city in Zhejiang province, were sentenced to 14 years’ and 12 years’ imprisonment respectively for embezzling money from their congregation and “gathering a crowd to disturb social order”. Bao Guohua was vocal against the removal of the crosses from churches.

Name: Zhang Kai, Liu Peng, Fang Xiangui
Gender m/f: Male

Further information on UA: 190/15 Index: ASA 17/3559/2016 China Date: 3 March 2016