

PUBLIC

AI Index: ASA 17/041/2005

25 November 2005

UA 298/05 Fear for safety

CHINA Zhao Xin (m), aged 35, academic and human rights defender

On 17 November, Zhao Xin, director of the Beijing-based human rights organization The Empowerment and Rights Institute, was severely beaten by seven men in Maoxin, Sichuan province. Amnesty International believes that this attack was an attempt to stop him carrying out his human rights work, and fears that he may be at risk of further abuse.

Zhao Xin was reportedly leaving a restaurant with seven of his friends when the men confronted him. Armed with steel pipes and knives, three men repeatedly struck Zhao Xin across his head, back and chest. The violence escalated as a fourth man and eventually another three joined in. The attack lasted for approximately half an hour. Zhao Xin was the sole focus of the violence, and his friends were intimidated and forcibly prevented from intervening. The beating continued despite Zhao Xin offering his attackers money and pleading with them to stop. After the attackers left him, Zhao Xin's friends took him to a nearby hospital where he received treatment for his injuries. He needed 11 stitches for a wound to his head, and also suffered a shattered knee cap. Doctors have told Zhao Xin that he will have to remain in hospital for at least a month and his right leg may never fully heal.

The police in Sichuan province have reportedly refused to investigate the beating, and have not offered him any protection when he leaves the hospital. Over the last year, there have been several reports of violence and beatings being perpetrated by local gangs, apparently backed by local police or other authorities. Zhao Xin may be in danger of further attack.

Zhao Xin is an influential figure in China's civil rights movement. He was a student leader during the 1989 Tiananmen democratic movement and a former chief organizer of the banned opposition group, the China Democracy Party. He has also written numerous articles advocating human rights and democracy in China, often using the pen name Zhao Zixian. At the time of the attack, Zhao Xin was on probation following an earlier charge of "assembling crowds to disrupt public order" as a result of posting articles on the internet that were critical of the Chinese government. He served a six-week prison sentence for this crime.

In early November Zhao Xin was instructed by officers from the Beijing Public Security Bureau (PSB) to leave Beijing during visits to China by US President, George W Bush and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, Manfred Nowak. President Bush visited China in mid-November, while the Special Rapporteur is visiting at the end of November. Although the PSB reportedly assured Zhao Xin he would be safe in Maoxin, he has reported that since he arrived there he was followed by a black Audi car, which he believes in an official government car. On the night of the attack, Zhao Xin claims that the government car he believes had been following him was parked close to the restaurant he visited. Zhao Xin suspects that his attackers were hired by the Chinese government to prevent him carrying out his human rights work. He believes this attack was precipitated by his involvement in the recent effort to re-run an election in Taishi Village, Guangdong Province.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In autumn 2005, villagers in Taishi Village signed a petition calling for a local election to be re-run, in an attempt to remove an allegedly corrupt village official from office. Zhao Xin assisted the villagers in calling for greater democracy, including by raising funds for legal assistance in support of the petition. However, the petition failed after villagers, activists, legal advisors and journalists who tried to enter the village were reportedly detained, beaten, or intimidated by the police or others allegedly acting on orders from the local

authorities. Some people remain in custody. The authorities' intimidation reportedly led some of the villagers to withdraw their names from the petition, and the elections were not re-run. The case has been widely interpreted in the Chinese and overseas media as a test case of local democracy in China.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals as quickly as possible, in English, Chinese or your own language to the following address:

- expressing concern about the attack on Zhao Xin and calling on the local government to take all necessary measures to guarantee his safety;
- urging the authorities to conduct a full and impartial investigation into his beating, and to bring those found responsible for either conducting or sanctioning the attack to justice;
- reminding the authorities that the UN Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Liberties recognizes the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders and their right to carry out their activities without any restrictions or fear of reprisals;
- urging the authorities to guarantee that Zhao Xin can carry out his legitimate and peaceful activities in defence of human rights without fear of violence, arbitrary detention, imprisonment, hindrance or intimidation.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister

WEN Jiabao Guojia Zongli

The State Council

9 Xihuangcheng Genbeijie

Beijingshi 100032, People's Republic of China

Fax: + 86 10 65292345 (c/o Ministry of Communication)

Salutation: Your Excellency

Director of the Sichuan Provincial Department of Public Security

LU Zhuo Tingzhang

Sichuan Provincial Department of public Security

40 Wenmiaohoujie

Chengdushi 610041

Sichuan Province, People's Republic of China

Email: info@scga.gov.cn

Fax: + 86 28 84356784 or 6789 (c/o Sichuan Province Foreign Affairs Office)

Salutation: Dear Director

COPIES TO:

Governor of the Sichuan Provincial People's Government

ZHANG Zhongwei Shengzhang

Provincial People's Government

30 Duyuanjie, Jinjiangqu,

Chengdong shi 610016

Sichuan Province, People's Republic of China

Email: adslscsf@mail.sc.sinifo.net

Fax: + 86 28 84356784 or 6789 (c/o Sichuan Province Foreign Affairs Office)

Salutation: Dear Governor

and to diplomatic representatives of China accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 6 January 2005.