

URGENT ACTION

AGEING COUPLE FACE JAIL FOR RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

An elderly couple are about to be put on trial because they practice Falun Gong. They may receive lengthy prison terms on account of their religious beliefs. They are in custody in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, in northern China, and are at risk of torture or other ill-treatment.

Falun Gong practitioners **Yan Dongfei** and her husband **Qiao Yongfang**, each of them aged 60, have been held at the No. 1 Detention Center in the city of Hohhot (Mongolian spelling; in Chinese, "Huhehaote ") since 8 June. They were not formally arrested until 5 July on suspicion of "using a heretical organization to undermine implementation of the law". Other Falun Gong members convicted on similar charges have been sentenced to eight years or more in prison. The procuratorate has twice sent their case back to the police, for lack of evidence: this means it is likely to go to trial very soon. Family members were previously told that the couple's case was "serious" and "complicated," and that Yan Dongfei and Qiao Yongfang were not "cooperating" with the authorities. Defendants who do not admit their "guilt" tend to receive harsher sentences.

Yan Dongfei and Qiao Yongfang have been allowed no visits or phone calls from their family since they have been in custody. They have been allowed only one visit from their lawyers, on 21 August, despite the lawyers' repeated efforts. A security official was present during the meeting, according to the lawyers, and this prevented the couple from speaking freely. During that meeting the lawyers learned that Qiao Yongfang had been tortured, resulting in injuries to his head, for which he is not known to have received adequate medical treatment. According to the lawyer, he appeared disoriented and depressed. It is not known whether Yan Dongfei has also been ill-treated.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in English, Mandarin or your own language:

- √ Urging the authorities to release Yan Dongfei and Qiao Yongfang immediately and unconditionally, unless they are charged with an internationally recognized crime and tried promptly in proceedings which meet fair trial standards;
- √ Expressing concern that they have been detained solely because of their religious beliefs, and are therefore prisoners of conscience;
- √ Calling on the authorities to guarantee that Yan Dongfei and Qiao Yongfang will not be tortured or ill-treated;
- √ Demanding that the authorities give them immediate access to their family, medical care and a lawyer of their choosing,

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 20 NOVEMBER 2009 TO:

Huimin District People's Court
Huiminqu Renmin Fayuan
Hai Xi Lu
Huhehaote Shi 010000
Nei Menggu Zizhiqu
People's Republic of China
Salutation: Dear Head of the Court

Huimin District Procuratorate
Huiminqu Renmin Jiancha Yuan
He Fang
Xin Hua Da Jie Xi Jie
Huhehaote Shi 010000
Nei Menggu Zizhiqu
People's Republic of China
Salutation: Dear Head of the Procuratorate

And copies to:
Huhehaote Procuratorate
Huhehaote Shi Renmin Jiancha Yuan
Huhehaote Shi 010000
Nei Menggu Zizhiqu
People's Republic of China
Salutation: Dear Head of the Procuratorate

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives of China accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA: 163/09 (ASA 17/029/2009). Further information:

www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA17/029/2009/en

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The spiritual movement Falun Gong was outlawed in China after its practitioners held a peaceful sit-in on Tiananmen Square in July 1999. The government launched a campaign of intimidation and persecution, directed by a special organization called the 610 Office. Tens of thousands of Falun Gong practitioners have been arbitrarily detained since the spiritual movement was banned as a "threat to social and political stability" in July 1999. Those accused of being Falun Gong leaders or organizers have been jailed. Others have been held in psychiatric hospitals, but the vast majority have been held in Re-education Through Labour facilities. Re-education Through Labour is a form of administrative detention imposed without charge, trial or judicial review

Torture and other ill-treatment are endemic in all forms of detention, despite China's ratification of the UN Convention against Torture in 1988. Amnesty International also receives regular reports of deaths in custody; many of them caused by torture, in a variety of state institutions, including prisons, RTL facilities and police detention centres.

Further information on UA: 163/09 Index: ASA 17/057/2009 Issue Date: 09 October 2009

