

PUBLIC

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UA 91/09 Fear of Torture and Other Ill-Treatment

CHINA Tan Zuoren (m) aged 55

Sichuan environmental activist and writer Tan Zuoren was detained by the police in Chengdu city, Sichuan province on suspicion of "inciting subversion of state power" on 28 March. He is now detained at Wenjiang Detention Centre. Amnesty International believes that he is at risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

According to sources, local police requested Tan Zuoren to go to the police station for a talk on the morning of 28 March. At approximately 3:00pm the same afternoon, a group of police officers searched his home. The police took away some of his writings, other documents and video CDs and told his wife over the phone they had something to deliver to her. In the evening, the family received a notice issued by the Chengdu City Police Station which stated that Tan Zuoren had been detained for criminal investigation. The police rejected his wife's request to meet with him.

Local sources believed that Tan Zuoren's detention was linked to his intention to issue publicly on the first anniversary of the earthquake, a list of children who died during the earthquake on 12 May 2008, along with an independently investigated report on the collapse of many school buildings due to corruption.

Prior to this detention, Tan Zuoren had been repeatedly questioned by the police. He was also previously harassed by unidentified individuals who stole his computer twice and stabbed and injured his dog.

Tan Zuoren is a prominent environmentalist. He previously issued a report to warn against possible health, safety and environmental hazards by the government's PX chemical projects in Sichuan province. He has also volunteered with disaster management after the earthquake.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Human rights activists in China who attempt to report on human rights violations, challenge policies which the authorities find politically sensitive, or try to rally others to their cause, face serious risk of abuse. Broad and vaguely defined "stealing, possessing and leaking state secrets" and "subversion" charges are used to arbitrarily detain and prosecute activists, journalists and internet users. Many are jailed as prisoners of conscience after politically motivated trials, while growing numbers are being held under house arrest with the police conducting intrusive surveillance and standing guard outside. Since the beginning of 2009, a year that marks several sensitive anniversaries in China, the crackdown on human rights activists has intensified. Family members of human rights activists, including children, are increasingly targeted by the authorities in the crackdown.

In the wake of the Sichuan earthquake, Chinese authorities initially allowed unprecedented and widely praised reporting freedoms in the quake zone. However, later they curtailed foreign journalists and barred them entry from or escorted them out of towns in the affected areas. Human rights activists trying to investigate reasons for building collapse and families who lost their children and are trying to seek justice are being harassed and are under surveillance.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, Mandarin or your own language:

- calling on the authorities to release Tan Zuoren immediately and unconditionally;
- urging the authorities to guarantee that he is not subject to tortured or otherwise ill-treated while in custody;
- urging authorities to ensure his access to lawyer, family and any medical treatment he may require;
- calling on the authorities to take effective measures to ensure that all human rights defenders can carry out their peaceful activities without fear of arbitrary detention, imprisonment, hindrance or intimidation, in line with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister of the People's Republic of China

WEN Jiabao Guojia Zongli

The State Council General Office

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People's Republic of China

Fax: +86 10 65961109 (c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

Salutation: Your Excellency

Governor of the Sichuan Provincial People's Government

JIANG Jufeng Shengzhang

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Salutation: Dear Governor

Director of the Sichuan Provincial Department of Public Security

ZENG Shengquan Tingzhang

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Chengdushi 610041

Sichuansheng

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Salutation: Dear Director

Director of the Chengdu City Department of Public Security

Li Kunxue Juzhang

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Chengdushi 610016

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People's Republic of China

Email: cdsgaj@cheng.gov.cn

Salutation: Dear Director

COPIES 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 14 May 2009.