

Hu Jintao, President of the People's Republic of China
c/o Zhou Wenzhong
Chinese Ambassador to the United State
Embassy of the People's Republic of China
2300 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20008

Dear President Hu:

As scholars, lawyers, and human rights advocates, we, the undersigned, write to express our grave concern about the reports of recent abductions and detentions of our colleagues—lawyers and rights defenders in China who are engaged in a peaceful hunger strike.

We understand that a number of Chinese human rights defenders who supported or participated in a hunger-strike that started February 4, 2006 are being arrested or have gone missing. We urge you to clarify their exact whereabouts, ensure their safety, and release them unless they are charged with a recognizably criminal offense.

It has been reported that Gao Zhisheng, a prominent defense lawyer, launched the hunger-strike to protest recent beatings and detentions of human rights activists and their defense lawyers. Showing their solidarity, dozens of supporters from various parts of China have quickly joined the relay hunger-strike in turn. On March 4, police detained Gao Zhisheng in Beijing.

Multiple reports describe the detention and abduction of several of those who have participated in or supported the hunger-strike. China does not permit independent human rights groups to work openly in the country, and the following list is based on available information:

HIV/AIDS activist Hu Jia, who was closely followed by police until he disappeared on February 16. Police have repeatedly refused to give his wife information about his detention.

Qi Zhiyong, a pro-democracy activist, went missing at around 11pm on February 15. He reportedly sent a text message to friends at the time saying that he was being kidnapped.

Zhao Xin, executive director of the Empowerment and Rights Institute, a Chinese human rights NGO, has been detained in Yunnan. His family was given no formal notice of his detention, but police warned his father not to tell anyone about his detention.

Yu Zhijian, a pro-democracy activist who was prominent in the 1989 demonstrations, joined the hunger strike; he has been charged with subversion.

Artist and activist Yan Zhengxue was taken away by police on February 12, after his meeting with Gao Zhisheng.

Mao Hengfeng, a Shanghai-based activist, who was detained by police on February 13. The police reportedly refused to disclose to her husband where she was being detained.

Shanghai housing rights activist Chen Xiaoming was detained on February 15 or 16 by police, who cited his participation in the hunger strike.

Wen Haibo and Ma Wendu, assistants to Gao Zhisheng, who were reportedly detained on February 16 and interrogated for 48 and 20 hours respectively before being placed under tight police surveillance in their homes.

Ouyang Xiaorong, a computer software programmer who also went to Beijing to assist Gao

Zhisheng with the hunger strike, was reportedly detained at the same time.

Shanghai police detained housing rights activist Ma Yalian on February 15.

Professor Wang Lizhuang, who has been active in protesting forced evictions in Shanghai, was detained by police on February 21.

In Guangxi, lawyer Yang Zhaixin has been placed under house arrest.

Anhui activist Hou Wenbao was detained on March 1, the same day he announced plans to join the hunger strike.

We are also concerned about reports from many regions of the country of the beatings, intimidation, and harassment of rights defenders and supporters of the protest.

The right to freedom of expression, including the freedom to peacefully protest, is a fundamental human right protected both by China's Constitution and by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which China has signed. A hunger strike is a peaceful form of protest. As scholars, lawyers, and human rights advocates, we urge you to ensure that our colleagues in China are able to enjoy their right to freedom of expression.

We call on you to ensure that all human rights defenders, including those named above and others supporting or participating in the hunger-strike, are allowed to continue their peaceful activities without fear of arbitrary detention, harassment, or other human rights violation.

We appeal to you for clarification of the exact whereabouts of those reported abducted, missing, or detained. We ask that you guarantee their safety and that you release them immediately unless they are charged with a recognizably criminal offense.

Yours sincerely,

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Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, Canada

Center for the Study of Human Rights, Columbia University, USA

China AIDS Solidarity Network, USA

China Labor Watch, USA

China Orchid AIDS Project, China

Committee for Human Rights of the American Anthropological Association, USA

Health GAP, USA

Human Rights Watch

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Initiatives Femmes Enfants et Developpement (IFED), Democratic Republic of Congo

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