

# URGENT ACTION

## ACTIVIST HELD INCOMMUNICADO FOR MONTHS

Yang Zhengjun, a prominent workers' rights activist has been held incommunicado since 8 January 2019. The editor-in-chief of iLabour.net / "New Generation" (*Xinshengdai*), an independent website covering workers' rights stories, his detention is believed to be a part of a nation-wide crackdown targeting workers, students and activists supporting workers' rights and freedom of speech on university campuses in China. With no access to his family, or a family lawyer, there are grave concerns for his mental and physical wellbeing.

**TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER**

**Song Yiyang**

**Director of Shenzhen City Pingshan District Public Security Sub-bureau**

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Dear Director,

**Yang Zhengjun** was taken away from Guangzhou on 8 January 2019 and has been held incommunicado ever since. As the editor-in-chief of iLabour.net / "New Generation" (*Xinshengdai*), a news site covering workers-related stories and reporting workers' rights movements, his detention comes amidst a large-scale crackdown on workers, students and labour activists across the country,

More than a month after he was taken away, the Pingshan District Public Security Sub-bureau notified Yang Zhengjun's family that he had been put under "Residential Surveillance at a Designated Location" for "picking quarrels and provoking troubles". While police told his wife that Yang Zhengjun was detained in Dapeng District in Shenzhen City, other lawyers said they had seen Yang in Shenzhen City No.2 Detention Centre. There is no way to verify Yang's whereabouts, nor his wellbeing, as all requests by his wife and lawyer to meet him have been rejected.

Yang Zhengjun's wife has faced continuous harassment since her husband was detained and, according to her, has been asked numerous times by the police to convince Yang to plead guilty. In March 2019, after a request by the police, their landlord did not renew the lease of their family home. As a result, Yang's wife, who was five months pregnant at the time, was forced to find somewhere new to live by herself.

I am concerned by the consistent use of "Residential Surveillance at a Designated Location" to curb the activities of human rights defenders, including lawyers, activists and religious practitioners. When held without access to legal counsel of their choice, their families or others, individuals are at real risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

**Therefore, I call on you to:**

- **immediately and unconditionally release Yang Zhengjun, unless there is sufficient credible and admissible evidence that he has committed an internationally recognized offense and is granted a fair trial in line with international standards;**
- **ensure that Yang Zhengjun is not subjected to any torture or other ill-treatment and has regular and unrestricted access to a lawyer of his choice and is able to communicate with family members, without interference unless justified in line with international human rights law; and**
- **end all harassment against Yang Zhengjun's family.**

Yours sincerely,

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Yang Zhengjun is a master degree graduate from Minzu University of China, Beijing, and works tirelessly to defend the rights of workers suffering from Pneumoconiosis, a disease of the lungs due to inhalation of dust. Along with Wei Zhili and Ke Chengbing, he ran iLabour.net, a website that promotes workers' rights, disseminates information about labour laws, and covers workers-related stories. After Yang's detention, Wei and Ke were also detained in March and subsequently put under Residential Surveillance at a Designated Location" with the same charge in April 2019.

"Residential surveillance in a designated location" is a measure that, under certain circumstances, enables criminal investigators to hold individuals for up to six months outside the formal detention system in what can amount to a form of secret incommunicado detention.

The detention of the three editors is part of a nation-wide crackdown targeting workers, students and activists supporting workers' rights and freedom of speech on university campuses. It first started in July 2018, when 30 workers from Jasic Technology Co Ltd, a Shenzhen-based private welding equipment manufacturer, tried to form their own union. The protests received support from university students across the country. Police detained the peaceful protesters and their supporters on 27 July 2018. Following the first wave of arrests in July 2018, more than a dozen labour activists and students supporting the Jasic workers were taken away on 9 November 2018. Among them are graduates from Peking University, one of the most prestigious universities in China. According to media reports, one of the students was beaten up and taken away by a group of people in dark clothing inside the university campus. The security on campus reportedly did nothing to stop the people from beating him and taking him away. The whereabouts of some students remain unknown.

The crackdown also extended to Marxist societies in universities, as they were very active in supporting workers' protests in different parts of the country. On 29 April 2019, five students from the Peking University Marxist Society went missing. One of the missing students Qiu Zhanxuan released a video in early May detailing his experience of being tortured and subjected to other forms of ill treatment while in detention in late April. According to his video, he was slapped by the police until his nose bled. Police also forced him to sign a letter declaring that he gave up his right to receive education. In recent years, China has enacted legislation and regulations to protect workers' rights, but there is poor implementation of these laws. According to China National Bureau of Statistics, only 35 percent of China's 281 million "migrant domestic workers" had labour contracts in 2016. At the same time, independent unions are banned, and the state-run All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) is the only body allowed to represent workers in China. ACFTU-affiliated unions at the enterprise level are often controlled by factory management and have little capacity to protect workers' interests.

**PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET:** Chinese or English

You can also write in your own language.

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL:** 6 September 2019

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

**NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN:** YANG Zhengjun (he/him)