

URGENT ACTION

GRAVE CONCERNS FOR LIFE OF DETAINED JOURNALIST

Since being sentenced in September 2025 to another four years in prison, journalist Zhang Zhan's health has deteriorated to an alarming level. She suffers from serious gastric illness and has lost significant weight, becoming extremely weak. She has reportedly been on hunger strike against her arbitrary detention since January 2025. Her condition is life threatening, and urgent intervention in her case is critical; yet, persistent refusal to provide her access to a lawyer of her choice has hampered efforts to document her situation and appeal her conviction. She must be released immediately and, pending her release, she must have access to adequate healthcare, provided in compliance with medical ethics.

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

Vice Mayor Zhang Yahong

Shanghai Municipal People's Government
No. 200 Renmin Avenue Huangpu District
Shanghai, 200003
People's Republic of China

Dear Vice Mayor Zhang,

I am writing to express my grave concern for journalist and human rights defender **Zhang Zhan (张展)**, whose health condition is cause for urgent alarm, while her human rights continue to be violated.

For many months now, there have been grave concerns for Zhang Zhan's health and the adequacy of healthcare provided to her in custody. She is reported to be extremely weak, suffering from serious gastric illness, and to have become significantly thinner.

Zhang has also been on hunger strike against her arbitrary detention. As you may be aware, during her previous imprisonment, she went on a prolonged hunger strike that led to multiple hospitalizations, raising further concerns about the cumulative impact on her health.

Following her conviction in September 2025, it has been reported that her lawyers' repeated requests to meet with her have been consistently refused, denying her meaningful access to legal counsel and the right to appeal. Her family and lawyer have also reportedly been subjected to harassment and intimidation by the authorities— another serious cause for concern.

14 May 2026 marks six years since Zhang Zhan's first arrest, after which she served a four-year sentence following a sham trial – she was arrested again less than four months after her release and remains deprived of liberty to this day. This sombre anniversary underscores the iterative nature of the violations she has endured and the continued failure to remedy her situation.

I call on you to:

- **Release Zhang Zhan immediately and unconditionally and ensure the convictions are quashed;**
- **Pending her release, ensure that Zhang Zhan has adequate access to qualified health professionals providing health care in compliance with medical ethics, including the principles of confidentiality, autonomy, and informed consent.**
- **Ensure she can have access to her lawyers and family, and that she is not subject to torture or other ill-treatment;**
- **Stop harassing and threatening human rights defenders and those who support them, such as their families and lawyers.**

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Chinese journalist and activist Zhang Zhan was convicted of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” and sentenced to four years in jail following her trial on 19 September 2025 at the Pudong New District People’s Court.

Since being sentenced again in September 2025, Zhang Zhan’s health has worsened dramatically. She is suffering from severe stomach problems, and has lost a significant amount of weight, leaving her extremely weak. Reports indicate that she has been on hunger strike since January 2025 to protest her detention. Also, the authorities have repeatedly denied her access to a lawyer of her choice, making it difficult to monitor her situation or properly pursue an appeal against her conviction.

Zhang Zhan was previously convicted of the same “crime” for reporting on the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic in Wuhan. A former lawyer, she travelled to Wuhan in February 2020 to provide on-the-ground information about what was happening there. She posted on social media about how government officials had detained independent reporters and harassed families of Covid-19 patients.

She went missing in Wuhan in May 2020. It later emerged that she had been taken by the Chinese authorities and detained in Shanghai, where she was convicted of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” after a sham trial. Zhang Zhan was released on 13 May 2024 after completing a four-year prison sentence.

Upon release, she was subjected to strict surveillance and continuous harassment by the authorities, and she was detained again less than four months later. Her second arrest (in September 2024) came shortly after she reportedly travelled to the northwestern province of Gansu to show solidarity with other human rights defenders.

Zhang Zhan has spent more than five and a half years deprived of her liberty, solely for exercising her right to freedom of expression. During her previous imprisonment, she went on a hunger strike that led to multiple hospitalizations and her weight dropped drastically to just 37 kilograms — half of what she weighed prior to her deprivation of liberty.

Zhang Zhan was featured in Amnesty International’s [2021 Write for Rights campaign](#).

Amnesty International has documented numerous cases of independent journalists and activists who were sentenced for reporting on the pandemic, with Zhang Zhan being a notable example. These repressive measures intensified after the 2022 “White Paper Movement,” leading to further restrictions on civil society. More information on the misuse of national security- and public order-related criminal provisions to target human rights activism, covering cases of 64 individuals over the last ten years, is available in our October 2025 report, [How could this verdict be ‘legal’?](#)

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English or Chinese

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 31 December 2026. Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Zhang Zhan (She/her - Zhang is her surname, Zhan is her given name)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa17/0539/2025/en>