

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVIST DETAINED FOR SHOWING PHOTO OF DALAI LAMA

Zhang Yi, a Chinese activist, was detained in Lhasa, Tibet, on 1 July 2026 after showing a photograph of the Dalai Lama on his mobile phone while visiting Sera Monastery. He was formally arrested on 28 July 2026 on suspicion of “inciting separatism”. Zhang Yi is a person with a disability and concerns remain about his wellbeing in detention. His detention appears to stem solely from the peaceful exercise of his human rights. The authorities must immediately release him.

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

Secretary Wang Junzheng

Party Secretary of the Tibet Autonomous Region
No. 1 Kang'ang East Road
Chengguan District, Lhasa
Tibet Autonomous Region 850000
People's Republic of China

Dear Secretary Wang,

I am writing to express my grave concern about the detention of **Zhang Yi (张毅)**, a Chinese human rights defender who was detained in Lhasa, Tibet, on 1 July 2026 and formally arrested on 28 July 2026 on suspicion of “inciting separatism” (煽动分裂国家罪).

Zhang Yi reportedly suffered torture and other ill-treatment during a previous period of detention, resulting in hearing loss and leaving him with a disability. Given his past experience of torture and his disability, I am deeply concerned about his wellbeing and safety in detention.

As you may be aware from media reports, Zhang Yi was visiting Sera Monastery in Lhasa with his younger brother when he showed a photograph of the Dalai Lama on his mobile phone to a Tibetan worshipper. Shortly afterwards, he was detained by police. The authorities have not publicly disclosed the factual basis for the accusation against him.

According to reliable information, on 17 August 2026, a lawyer sought information from the authorities about the possibility of meeting Zhang Yi. The authorities reportedly declined to arrange a meeting and indicated that the case would soon be transferred to the procuratorate for review and prosecution. To date, no lawyer or family member has been granted access to Zhang Yi, raising concerns about his wellbeing and his right to due process and a fair trial.

I find it distressing that Zhang Yi appears to have been arrested solely for exercising his human rights. Showing a photograph of a religious leader cannot reasonably be assessed as a threat to national security and therefore should not be treated as such. Finally, given Zhang's previous allegations of torture and the long-term effects on his health, I am extremely worried about his safety, well-being, and access to adequate health care while in detention.

This case also reinforces concerns raised by Amnesty International regarding the [Ethnic Unity and Progress Law](#) which entered into force on 1 July and whose broad provisions risk further restricting human rights, including the rights to freedom of religion and belief and freedom of expression.

I therefore call on you to:

- **Release Zhang Yi immediately and unconditionally and drop all charges against him;**

- ***Pending his release, ensure that Zhang Yi has regular, unrestricted access to lawyers of his choice and his family, as well as access to adequate health care, and that he is not subject to torture or other ill-treatment;***
- ***End the use of laws, policies and administrative measures, including the Ethnic Unity and Progress Law, to restrict the peaceful exercise of human rights and to suppress cultural, religious and civic expression.***

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Zhang Yi (张毅) is a Chinese pro-democracy activist and human rights defender from Wuhan, Hubei province. He became politically active during the 1989 Tiananmen Square pro-democracy movement and was subsequently imprisoned for two years because of his participation. During that detention, he was reportedly subjected to torture and other ill-treatment, resulting in the loss of hearing in one ear and partial hearing loss in the other. Despite ongoing health challenges, he has continued to speak out on human rights and democracy issues.

On 1 July 2026, Zhang Yi was visiting Sera Monastery in Lhasa with his younger brother. After he was unable to communicate verbally with a Tibetan worshipper from whom he wished to borrow a prayer mat, he showed the person a photograph of the Dalai Lama on his mobile phone. According to information received by Amnesty International, plain-clothes officers appeared to observe the interaction, and Zhang Yi was detained shortly afterwards. He was formally arrested on 28 July 2026 on suspicion of “inciting separatism” (煽动分裂国家罪). The authorities have not publicly disclosed the factual basis for the accusation.

Zhang Yi was detained on the same day that China's [Ethnic Unity Law](#) entered into force on 1 July 2026. The law contains broad and vaguely worded provisions requiring the promotion of “ethnic unity” and a shared national identity, creating additional legal grounds for restricting the peaceful exercise of human rights, including the rights to freedom of expression, religion or belief, and cultural rights. Amnesty International has warned that the law could further entrench policies aimed at assimilating ethnic minority communities.

Amnesty International has repeatedly documented the Chinese authorities' misuse of the offence of “inciting separatism” against Tibetans and others for the peaceful exercise of their human rights. Previous cases have involved individuals advocating for Tibetan language education, expressing views relating to Tibetan culture and religion, or sharing information about the Dalai Lama. Against this backdrop, Zhang Yi's prosecution raises serious concerns that he is being targeted solely for peacefully exercising his human rights.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English or Chinese

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 28 February 2027. Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Zhang Yi (He/him - Zhang is his surname, Yi is his given name)