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CHINA | Lawyer Sentenced to Prison

Chinese human rights lawyer, Jiang Tianyong, was sentenced to two years in prison on the charge of “inciting subversion of state power” on Nov. 21. However, CSW believes his conviction is on account of his human rights work.

As previously reported by CSW, Jiang spent years working to defend human rights and rule of law, including representing religious or belief communities. He also worked on the high profile cases of activists Chen Guangcheng and Gao Zhisheng. As a result of his work, his lawyers’ license was revoked in 2009 by the Beijing authorities, but Jiang continued to provide legal advice to victims of human rights abuses. As a result he has been repeatedly harassed, detained and beaten.

Jiang went missing Nov. 21, 2016 on his way home to Beijing after visiting the wife of detained human rights lawyer Xie Yang in Hunan. He was put on trial in August 2017 but was denied access to legal counsel of his choosing.

This is the latest in a long line of disappearances, arrests and trials of human rights lawyers in China. Since July 2015, over 300 lawyers and their colleagues and family members have been disappeared, interrogated and arrested in a sweeping crackdown on human rights defenders. Many lawyers who are released after long periods of incommunicado detention reveal that they were subject to physical and psychological torture during their detention. In some cases they were only released after making a forced “confession.”

Jiang Tianyong had also worked on the case of Gao Zhisheng, who is himself a lawyer and has defended religious communities including Christians and Falun Gong practitioners. Between 2006-2011, Gao was disappeared multiple times and suffered beatings and torture. From 2011-2014 he served a prison sentence. He was released in August 2014, only to be disappeared again on Aug. 13. His family has received conflicting accounts of his current whereabouts but he is believed to be in police custody.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "The sentence handed down to lawyer Jiang Tianyong is yet another example of the government's treatment of human rights defenders. This sentence is a reprisal against Jiang for years of dedicated work defending human rights and rule of law in China. Jiang's own case demonstrates the prevalence of rights violations which severely undermine rule of law. We further condemn the secret detention of lawyer Gao Zhisheng. We call on the authorities to release Jiang Tianyong and Gao Zhisheng immediately and unconditionally, and to ensure that any allegations of torture and ill-treatment are fully and impartially investigated in accordance with Chinese and international law."