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CHINA | Human Rights Lawyer Sentenced to Prison

Chinese authorities sentenced human rights lawyer Wang Quanzhang to four-and-a-half years in prison on Jan. 28 after over three years in incommunicado detention. Wang, 42, has reportedly been charged with “subversion of state power.”

Wang Quanzhang was arrested in August 2015 as part of the “709 crackdown” in which over 300 lawyers, human rights defenders, and their colleagues and family members were detained, interrogated or imprisoned. The majority of those detained have since been released, and reports of physical and psychological torture, including frequent beatings, sleep deprivation, forced medication, violent threats, and prolonged isolation, have subsequently emerged.

For just under three-and-a-half years following his arrest, Wang was detained incommunicado, with no information made public about his current status or well-being, or even if he was dead or alive. On Dec. 26, 2018 he was put on trial, but his wife, Li Wenzu, was prevented from attending, as were other activists, journalists and diplomats.

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “CSW condemns the sentencing of lawyer Wang Quanzhang in the strongest terms and calls for his immediate and unconditional release. Nobody should be imprisoned for defending human rights, the detention of Wang Quanzhang is entirely arbitrary and a violation of international law.”

Wang’s sentencing comes amid a severe deterioration in China’s human rights situation which has taken place under President Xi Jinping. Since 2017, over one million Uyghurs, Kazakhs and members of other ethnic groups are believed to have been detained without charge in political re-education camps in the north western Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Last year also saw an increased countrywide crackdown on both registered and unregistered Protestant and Catholic churches, including Early Rain Church, Living Stone Church and Zion Church.

Many other activists and lawyers also remain in detention in China as a further indicator of the current regime’s campaign to silence dissent.

Thomas said, "The deteriorating situation for human rights in China, including the right to freedom of religion or belief, is extremely alarming. CSW calls on the government of China to ensure that it upholds the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and releases all those detained in connection with the exercise of any such right. We also call on the international community to hold China to account by consistently raising violations of human rights in bilateral and multilateral dialogues with the country."