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China: Amnesty International's reaction to Gao Zhisheng verdict

Reacting to today's verdict by Beijing Municipal No.1 Court which has given rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng a three-year suspended prison sentence for 'inciting subversion', Amnesty International said

"While we note the unusual decision to give rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng a suspended sentence, we remain deeply concerned that he has been convicted of 'inciting subversion' - a broadly defined crime in the Chinese criminal law that is regularly used to imprison activists in violation of their fundamental human rights to freedom of expression.

"That a Beijing court has stopped short of sending Gao Zhisheng to jail does not detract from the fact that this was a grossly unfair trial and the latest example in a disturbing pattern of Chinese lawyers and activists being subjected to conviction after unfair trials by the Chinese authorities. We urge the authorities to now release Gao Zhisheng immediately and unconditionally and to stop the persecution of both him and his family." said Catherine Baber, Deputy Director of the Asia programme at Amnesty International

Notes

Gao Zhisheng has been sentenced to 3 years in prison, suspended for five years. This means that he will not be imprisoned unless he commits criminal offences during the five-year period. If imprisoned Amnesty International would consider Gao Zhisheng a prisoner of conscience. It is expected that he will be released soon but is likely to remain under tight supervision by the authorities.

While suspended sentences are common in death penalty cases (with death sentences usually commuted to life imprisonment), they are much less common in ordinary criminal cases. It is appears that the authorities wished to show leniency in his case - possibly due to potential embarrassment and opposition both domestically and internationally to putting such a high profile lawyer behind bars.

For a background briefing on this case please see:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGASA170662006>

Public Document

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