

# URGENT ACTION

## HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS FACE LENGTHY SENTENCES

Anti-discrimination NGO workers Cheng Yuan, Liu Yongze and Wu Gejianxiong were tried in secret between 31 August and 4 September 2020 on charges of “subversion of state power”. They face lengthy prison sentences if found guilty. Their families only found out about the trial on 10 September, almost one week after it had ended. No further details about the case have been made public, and all family members have since been barred from entering the Changsha Municipality Intermediate People’s Court. The three men must be immediately and unconditionally released as they are considered prisoners of conscience, detained solely for carrying out their professional work and peacefully defending human rights.

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

*President of the People’s Republic of China, Xi Jinping*

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*Dear President Xi:*

*I am writing to express my grave concern for **Cheng Yuan (程渊)**, **Liu Yongze (刘永泽)** and **Wu Gejianxiong (吴葛健雄)**, who were tried in secret between 31 August and 4 September 2020 on the charge of “subversion of state power” (颠覆国家政权罪). Detained incommunicado for more than 14 months, with no way for their families or lawyers to check their physical and mental well-being, I fear that they are at risk of torture and other ill-treatment.*

*It is distressing to learn that family members of the three men were only informed of the trial on 10 September, almost one week after it had concluded. Instead of being duly notified about the case proceedings, the family members had to proactively seek information from government-appointed lawyers themselves. No further details about the case has been provided to them, and all family members have since been barred from entering the Changsha Municipality Intermediate People’s Court.*

*It is upsetting that individuals like Cheng Yuan, Liu Yongze and Wu Gejianxiong who advocate for the rights of marginalized groups and work to protect the rights of the most vulnerable people in society are being detained, accused of serious national security charges and subjected to a secret trial. The arbitrary detention of these three individuals on the basis of their activities as anti-discrimination NGO workers violates the principle of equality before the law and equal protection of the law under Article 7 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.*

*Cheng Yuan, Liu Yongze and Wu Gejianxiong are prisoners of conscience who have been detained solely for carrying out their professional work and peacefully defending human rights. Therefore, I call on you to:*

- *immediately and unconditionally release Cheng Yuan, Liu Yongze and Wu Gejianxiong, as they have been detained solely for carrying out their professional work and peacefully defending human rights.*
- *ensure that each has regular, unrestricted access to family members and lawyers of their choice and ensure that they are not subjected to torture or other ill-treatment while in detention*

*Yours sincerely,*

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Held incommunicado for more than one year, Cheng Yuan, Liu Yongze and Wu Gejianxiong have had no contact with their family since being first detained on 22 July 2019. Immediately after their arrest, their families appointed lawyers for each of them. However, the family-appointed lawyers received notices from the authorities that they had been “dismissed”. The authorities claimed that the dismissal had been requested by the three detainees, even though none of the family-appointed lawyers had been allowed to meet their clients since they were detained. Consequently, the three were assigned government-appointed lawyers. The families believe that the three were coerced to fire the family-appointed lawyers. Amnesty International has documented instances in which the Chinese authorities have forced detained human rights defenders to fire lawyers of their choice and appointed pro-government lawyers to defend them against politically motivated charges.

Since March 2020, the family members continue to reiterate publicly that they wish the three to be represented by the lawyers that they appointed for them. However, the legal-aid lawyers refused to withdraw from their case. The family members found that the lawyers withhold information from them and are not forthcoming in sharing information with the family. It was only after Cheng Yuan’s wife called the lawyer herself that she learned that the trio had been indicted in July 2020. Similarly, Wu Gejianxiong’s father only learned about the trial from a conversation that he had with one of the legal-aid lawyers.

Changsha Funeng (长沙富能) is an NGO advocating for the rights of people with disabilities and other marginalized groups and combats employment discrimination against people living with HIV and hepatitis B through litigation. Cheng Yuan, the head of the organization, is an experienced public interest– and legal activist in China. By representing clients in about a dozen discrimination cases over the past decade, Cheng has contributed to the reduction of institutional discrimination against hepatitis B carriers in China. In 2013, he led a landmark lawsuit in which an HIV-positive person for the first time ever received compensation for employment discrimination. Apart from that, Cheng Yuan has continually used litigation and advocacy to work towards abolition of China’s “one child policy” and reform of the household registration (*hukou*) system. Liu Yongze and Wu Gejianxiong are both staff members of Changsha Funeng.

**PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET:** English or Chinese

You can also write in your own language.

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL:** 22 November 2020

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

**NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN:** Cheng Yuan (He/Him), Liu Yongze (He/Him), Wu Gejianxiong (He/Him)

**LINK TO PREVIOUS UA:** <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa17/2804/2020/en/>