

URGENT ACTION

LAWYER DEFENDING CHURCHES IN CHINA RELEASED

A prominent human rights lawyer supporting churches resisting the removal of crosses was released on 23 March after being detained for seven months.

Prominent human rights lawyer **Zhang Kai**, 37, posted on his WeChat and Weibo on 23 March evening saying that he “safely returned to his hometown in Inner Mongolia”, and thanked friends who showed concern for him and his family during his detention. His release was also confirmed by friends and family. However Zhang Kai did not mention any reason for his sudden release.

He was transferred to the Wenzhou Detention Centre under criminal detention on 26 February. He appeared on Chinese State television the day before in a taped “confession” in which he recognized having “violated national laws, disturbed social order, and endangered national security”. It was possible that the “confession” was made under duress. He was held on suspicion of “stealing, spying into, purchasing, or illegally providing state secrets or intelligence” to foreign actors and ‘disturbing social order’.

Zhang Kai was taken away by police from a church in Wenzhou, Zhejiang province, in south-east China on 25 August 2015. He was placed under ‘residential surveillance’ at a location outside the formal detention system, without access to his lawyers and family. His two assistants **Liu Peng** and **Fang Xiangui** were detained at the same time but were released on 11 December 2015.

Zhang Kai had been offering legal support to a number of churches in Zhejiang province after the authorities began demolishing churches and removing crosses and crucifixes in late 2013. According to activists, over 1,500 crosses were torn down and several churches destroyed within a few months, after the demolition intensified in 2015. Zhang Kai is one of over 200 lawyers and activists that have been targeted as part of a nationwide crackdown that began in July 2015.

Many thanks to all those that took action. No more action is required from the UA Network.

This is the second update of UA 190/15. Further information: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa17/3559/2016/en/>

Name: Zhang Kai, Liu Peng, Fang Xiangui
Gender m/f: Male

Further information on UA: 190/15 Index: 17/3715/2016 Issue Date: 25 March 2016

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**

