URGENT ACTION

NOT-GUILTY VERDICT FOR MEN SENTENCED TO DEATH

After more than 13 years since Huang Zhiqiang, Fang Chunping, Cheng Fagen and Cheng Lihe were originally sentenced to death, the Jiangxi Provincial Higher People's Court has announced a not-guilty verdict. All four men were immediately released after a closed-door retrial on 30 November 2016.

Huang Zhiqiang, Fang Chunping, Cheng Fagen and **Cheng Lihe** were all sentenced to death in 2003, by the Jingdezhen Intermediate People's Court in the central province of Jiangxi in China. Following an appeal filed by the four men, in May 2006, the Jiangxi Provincial Higher People's Court retried the case and commuted their death sentences to death sentences with a "two-year reprieve". A death sentence with a two year reprieve is usually commuted to a prison term after two years of good behaviour.

In 2006, the four men sought another retrial, claiming that they had confessed to the crimes under torture and coercion. The Jiangxi Provincial Higher People's Court finally agreed to another retrial in July 2015.

Following a closed-door retrial on 30 November 2016, the Court ruled on 21 December 2016 that there were contradictions in the evidence, and that the authenticity and legality of the men's confessions were uncertain. As a result, the Jiangxi Provincial Higher People's Court announced a not-guilty verdict and released all four men immediately.

While Xia Keqing, the Vice President of Jiangxi Higher People's Court, made an apology to the four and informed them about their rights to seek redress for the wrongful verdict, the court rejected their torture claims on the basis of a lack of evidence.

Thank you to all those who sent appeals. No further action is requested from the UA network.

This is the first update of UA: 256/05. Further information: https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa17/036/2005/en/

Names: Huang Zhiqiang, Fang Chunping, Cheng Fagen and Cheng Lihe
Gender: male

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