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China: Jail sentence for disabled housing activist 'unacceptable'

A prominent Chinese housing activist jailed today on spurious charges must be released immediately, Amnesty International said.

Ni Yulan, who is disabled, was handed a two year and eight-month sentence for "picking quarrels and making trouble" and "fraud." Her husband, Dong Jiqin, has been jailed for two years for "picking quarrels and making trouble".

Ni Yulan, a lawyer who has campaigned against forced evictions and other housing rights violations in China, has been detained for the past year.

The lawyer has been in a wheelchair for the past decade after being beaten by police in detention in 2002.

"These sentences are completely unacceptable and have been imposed solely because Ni Yulan has campaigned for the past decade, at great risk to herself, to protect human rights in China," said Catherine Baber, Amnesty International's Deputy Director of Asia Pacific.

"The authorities must release her and her husband, Dong Jiqin, immediately and unconditionally."

Police detained Ni Yulan and Dong Jiqin on 7 April 2011. Before their trial, authorities only allowed them to meet with their lawyers two or three times.

The couple's trial took place on 29 December at Beijing's Xicheng District People's Court and did not meet international fair trial standards.

Despite being a "public" trial, the court did not allow observers, including lawyers Bao Longjun and Wang Yu, to enter the court room.

Police took Bao Longjun away. They also blocked others from even approaching the courthouse, including Dong Jiqin's younger brother.

Ni Yulan's lawyer, Cheng Hai, proposed 11 witnesses to testify during the trial, but the court only accepted one, Ni Yulan's daughter Dong Xuan.

"The charges against Ni Yulan and Dong Jiqin, were totally unwarranted and their trial was unfair. The continued persecution of this couple for their efforts assisting others to pursue their legal rights raises questions about whether China is serious about becoming a country ruled by law, as the leaders have suggested, or a country ruled by fear and intimidation," Catherine Baber said.

Ni Yulan, 52, suffers from chronic health problems, partly as a result of previous torture at the hands of authorities. Her health worsened during her year-long detention.

During the trial, she spent much of the time lying in a hospital bed and needed a respirator to breathe.

Over the past 10 years the authorities have repeatedly subjected Ni Yulan to harassment, detention and torture.

In 2002, they revoked Ni Yulan's license to practice law as retaliation for her human rights work

She has now been jailed three times. When she was detained in 2002, her knee caps and feet were broken. Her injuries were so severe that she remains in a wheelchair.

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