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Jailing of Chinese activist Wang Lihong is 'inhumane'

A Chinese activist jailed in connection with her support for bloggers must be released, Amnesty International said today after she was sentenced to nine months in prison.

Wang Lihong, 56, was detained in March and later charged with “creating a disturbance” amid a government crackdown on online calls for a “Jasmine Revolution” inspired by protests in the Middle East and North Africa.

She had pleaded not guilty in court in Beijing and has told her lawyer that she plans to appeal.

"This unjust verdict is the latest example of China's zeal for persecuting anyone who dares to defy the tight controls in China and to publicly support human rights activists," said Sam Zarifi, Asia-Pacific Director at Amnesty International.

"Wang Lihong's arrest, trial and sentencing were a farce. She has worked peacefully for a more fair and just China and has consistently spoken out against human rights abuses in her country. For this, she should be commended, not jailed."

Wang Lihong was taken from her home by nine police officers on 21 March 2011.

The charges relate to her participation in a peaceful protest in April 2010 in support of three internet activists from Fujian province who were charged with defamation for posting questions online about an alleged police cover-up in the death of a young woman.

Wang Lihong's lawyers say they had limited access to her case documents, in violation of legal provisions on lawyers' rights, and that during the trial - which only lasted a few hours - they were not given enough time to present a proper defence.

Wang Lihong suffers from chronic back pain and her health has deteriorated after nearly five months in detention.

"Wang Lihong supports other peaceful activists by doing more than just speaking out. She often spent time with the family members of activists who had been arrested to help them out with cooking or other chores. She is tireless and selfless and because of this, people across the country have voiced their support for her," said Sam Zarifi.

"The Chinese authorities' persecution of Wang Lihong is not only inhumane but foolish. By silencing Wang Lihong, the Chinese authorities have silenced a force for good."

Several other activists targeted in a crackdown on freedom of expression earlier this year remain in detention. Writer and blogger Ran Yunfei was put under “residential surveillance” on 9 August, having been detained since March on charges of “inciting subversion of state power”.

Activist Hua Chunhui, who was arrested in February during the crackdown, is serving the remainder of his 18-month Re-education through Labour term at home on medical grounds.

Prominent dissident Ding Mao remains in detention on suspicion of “inciting subversion of state power”, while activists Chen Wei and Liang Haiyi have been in incommunicado detention since February.