

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVIST RELEASED ON MEDICAL PAROLE

Zhao Lianhai, a man who tried to seek justice for families affected by a tainted milk powder scandal in 2008, was released on medical parole on 28 December 2010, according to his former lawyers. He had been detained since his arrest at his home in the Chinese capital, Beijing on 13 November 2009.

Zhao Lianhai called the lawyers on 31 December and told them he had been home to see his family and was being sent to a hospital in Beijing municipality for medical treatment. It is not clear what type of treatment he received or whether he is still being treated.

On 10 November 2010, Daxing District People's Court in Beijing municipality convicted and sentenced Zhao Lianhai to two and a half years imprisonment for "provoking an incident" (Criminal Law article 293).

After the sentencing, the authorities pressured Zhao Lianhai's lawyers to maintain a low profile and his family not to speak to the media.

On 12 November, one of his lawyers was able to visit Zhao Lianhai at the Daxing Detention Centre. He asked the lawyer to file an appeal for him, and said he would continue the hunger strike, which he started when the verdict was handed down, until he was released. Zhao Lianhai's lawyers told reporters they were pressured by authorities to drop the appeal and were also prevented from visiting Zhao Lianhai again in detention. The authorities gave the lawyers a hand-written note they claimed Zhao Lianhai had written that said the prisoner no longer wanted to see them.

On 23 November, the official Xinhua News Agency Hong Kong branch announced that a medical parole application from Zhao Lianhai was being processed and he had accepted the court verdict and decided not to appeal.

Parents whose children fell ill or in some cases died after drinking milk products tainted with the chemical melamine in 2008, have been campaigning for justice since. Zhao Lianhai's son was one of the victims whose health was damaged by the contamination and he has been a leading figure in organizing the parents of victims. He organized a parents' self-help group, a campaign calling for regular health check-ups for those affected, and launched a website. Zhao Lianhai also helped parents file a lawsuit against the companies that produced the contaminated milk by collecting and organizing information on individual cases.

No further action is requested from the UA network. Many thanks to all who sent appeals.

This is the second update of UA 311/09 Index: ASA 17/003/2011 Further information: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA17/064/2009/en> and <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA17/007/2010/en>

Further information on UA: 311/09 Index: ASA 17/003/2011 Issue Date: 13 January 2011

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