

PUBLIC

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UA 104/01 Fear of Torture

24 April 2001

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA (PRC) Su Guosheng

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Su Guosheng was arrested on 14 April. He was alleged to have been one of the leaders of protests against high taxes in his village. A few hours later police raided the village and reportedly opened fire on protesters, killing two men. There has been no further news of Su Guosheng and Amnesty International believes that Su Guosheng is at risk of torture.

In 1998 local taxes reportedly rose by a third, even though the area had been devastated by floods. The people of Yuntang village have been refusing to pay the taxes, which they see as illegal and impossibly high.

According to foreign news reports, before sunrise on 15 April over 600 officers from the People's Armed Police and local Police officers overturned a roadblock erected by villagers and stormed the village. Officials reportedly armed with guns and electric batons began breaking into homes and waking the villagers. A crowd gathered in front of the local primary school and at 4.20am, according to witnesses, the police opened fire, aiming at the legs of the villagers. However, when the villagers tried to defend themselves by throwing rocks and sticks, the police began to shoot higher. Two people were reportedly killed, one paralysed and at least 38 wounded. Three villagers were also reportedly detained but released later.

Villagers have kept the bodies of the two men killed, Yu Xingguang (aged 38) and Yu Xinguan (aged 22). A provincial level Communist Party official has reportedly visited the village promising an investigation. It is not clear whether this has been launched, or what progress it has made.

Local officials had called the villagers a "criminal gang", and police and other officials had clashed with them in 1999 and 2000, but this is the first time they have opened fire. The raid may have been linked to the national "Strike Hard" anti-crime campaign, launched on 11 April, aimed at "cracking down on evil forces and wiping out hooligans". It has been reported that at least 350 people have been executed in the two weeks since the launch. It has also been reported that "Special Procedures" have been introduced which could result in arrests based on minimal evidence and summary trials.

The domestic media has not reported the shooting. Villagers are reportedly very fearful of contact with foreign media. The New York Times reported villagers saying that, "If the Communist regime knows we are meeting the foreign press, they might level our village."

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Rural discontent has been growing throughout China in recent years, in response to rising taxes, official corruption and the growing divide between rich and poor. There have been similar protests to that at Yuntang elsewhere in Jiangxi province. Last year in nearby Fengcheng town, thousands of peasants protested against harsh taxes.

Urban workers have also regularly protested about unpaid wages or pensions, and unpaid or embezzled redundancy payments.

Amnesty International is concerned that the "Strike Hard" campaign may influence the proceedings and outcome of criminal and political trials. Previous

anti-crime crackdowns have resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of people sentenced to death and a large number of suspected miscarriages of justice.

News of this shooting and the dramatic increase in executions came as the Chinese government managed to block debate of its human rights record at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights on 18 April, by using a procedural motion.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English, Chinese or your own language:**

- urging the authorities to make public why Su Guosheng has been arrested, and to release him immediately unless he is to be charged with a recognisably criminal offence;
- expressing grave concern that armed police were allowed to open fire on a crowd of unarmed villagers;
- urging the authorities to start an immediate and impartial investigation into the reported incidents at Yuntang village and the deaths of Yu Xinguang and Yu Xinguan, and to make the results public.

**APPEALS TO:**

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**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 1 June 2001.