

PUBLIC

AI Index: ASA 17/030/2003

11 July 2003

UA 210/03 **Fear of torture or ill-treatment/medical concern**

CHINA **16 unnamed individuals**

Sixteen unnamed people have been detained by police in Xiongqiao village in Shangcai county, Henan Province. All are thought to be HIV-positive and some may be suffering from AIDS. There are unconfirmed reports that at least some of them have been beaten in police custody and Amnesty International is concerned for their safety.

Thirteen of the detainees were arrested during a violent raid by around 600 police and other unidentified men on the village at around midnight on 22 June. A number of villagers, including children, were reportedly beaten with metal rods and electro-shock batons. At least 12 people were allegedly injured and several needed hospital treatment. Between three and six people are believed to remain in hospital. Their condition is not known.

The raid on Xiongqiao village may have been provoked by an earlier incident which took place between 19-22 June, when up to 100 HIV-positive villagers visited the provincial capital Zhengzhou to protest about the lack of adequate health care in Xiongqiao. Five of them were reportedly detained by the police and taken back to Xiongqiao. Two have since been released, but three are believed to remain in detention. One of those released has claimed that the detainees were beaten to force them to confess to crimes of "robbery" and "attacking government offices".

The 13 who were detained during the police raid on Xiongqiao village are reported to have been charged with similar offences to the three others. This appears to be in connection with an earlier confrontation between villagers and officials which took place on 17 June in nearby Wulong township. In this incident, around 100 villagers reportedly went to the township government office to present a petition for better health care services. An argument broke out between villagers and officials, leading to a violent confrontation in which several villagers reportedly damaged cars and assaulted officials.

Local police officers have reportedly confirmed that 13 arrests were made in connection with the police raid on Xiongqiao village on 22 June. They also stated that three others were arrested before the raid, although it is unclear whether these relate to the events in Zhengzhou or Wulong or other unrelated incidents.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

An estimated one third to one half of the 500-600 residents of Xiongqiao are reported to be HIV positive after becoming infected through selling their blood to government-sanctioned blood-collecting stations in the 1990s. The blood-collection schemes became a useful source of income for villagers, but were often poorly managed and unsafe. It is estimated that up to one million people may have been infected with the HIV virus in this way in Henan and other provinces.

The extent of the spread of HIV/AIDS in Henan became better known last year after the most prominent HIV/AIDS activist in China, Dr Wan Yanhai, head of the Beijing-based Aizhi Institute, published on his website (www.aizhi.org) lists of people who died in Henan province of HIV/AIDS related illnesses. He was arrested in August 2002 on suspicion of "leaking state secrets", but released around one month later after widespread international protests at his detention (See UA 273/02, ASA 17/043/2002, 2 September 2002, and follow-ups).

On 11 July, the Aizhi Institute reportedly wrote to the Health Minister of the Chinese government, calling for greater transparency and urging the government to release statistics detailing the number of people infected with the HIV virus through use of government-sanctioned blood collection centres and in which provinces.

The cost of medical treatment in China has increased sharply over recent years due to economic restructuring. Few villagers in Henan and other infected provinces have been given antiretroviral drugs or other specialist care.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- urging the authorities to clarify the names of all those detained in connection with the police raid on 22 June and the related events in Wulong and Zhengzhou, and to provide immediate guarantees for their safety;
- calling on the authorities to clarify the charges against the detainees and to release them unless they are charged with a recognizably criminal offence;
- urging the authorities to ensure that they are given access to lawyers, their families and to full medical treatment while they remain in detention;
- expressing concern at reports of indiscriminate beatings by police, and others apparently under the command of the police, during the raid on 22 June as well as allegations that the five Zhengzhou petitioners were also beaten in custody;
- calling on the authorities to launch an immediate and impartial investigation into these allegations, to make the results public and to bring those responsible to justice;
- urging the authorities to fully investigate the extent of HIV/AIDS transmission in Henan and other provinces due to the operation of blood-collection centres in the 1990s and to publish the findings of the investigation.

APPEALS TO:

Director of the Henan Provincial Department of Justice

XU Guohong Tingzhang

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People's Republic of China

Telegram: Justice Department Director, Zhengzhou, Henan, China

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Salutation: Dear Director

Minister of Justice of the People's Republic of China

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Sifabu

10 Chaoyangmen Nandajie, Chaoyangqu

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Telegram: Minister of Justice, Beijing, China

Fax: + 86 10 65 292345

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Public Health of the People's Republic of China

WU Yi Buzhang

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1 Xizhimenwai

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People's Republic of China

Telegram: Health Minister, Beijing, China

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Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO: Diplomatic representatives of China accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 22 August 2003.