

AI Index: PRE 01/164/2011
29 March 2011

China: Prominent blogger missing

The Chinese authorities must reveal the whereabouts of a political blogger and commentator who has not been seen since Sunday and is believed to be detained, Amnesty International said today.

Chinese-born former diplomat Yang Hengjun, an Australian national, informed his blog administrator in a phone call on Sunday that he was at Guangzhou Airport in southern China, being followed by three men.

Since then, those close to him have told Amnesty International that he has been detained by the Chinese authorities, although his whereabouts are unknown.

“Yang Hengjun’s disappearance is extremely worrying, especially as it comes during one of the biggest round-ups of activists and critics for years,” said Catherine Baber, Amnesty International’s Deputy Director for the Asia Pacific.

“He joins a long list of peaceful reformists who have gone missing or been arrested in China in the last month.”

Chinese government spokespeople have so far denied knowledge of Yang’s whereabouts in response to requests from the Australian government.

Amnesty International has logged dozens of arrests, detentions and disappearances of activists, Twitter-users and bloggers since February, when online calls for a ‘Jasmine Revolution’ in China began to circulate, inspired by protests in the Middle East and North Africa.

In the latest formal criminal charge to arise from the sweep, prominent Sichuan blogger Ran Yunfei was yesterday charged with ‘incitement to subvert state power’ after being detained for a month.

More than 20 activists, lawyers and bloggers are being held without charge, such as blogger Gu Chuan, who has been held in incommunicado detention for a month in Beijing. Amnesty International fears that he is at risk of torture and ill-treatment.

“There is no sign of this crackdown easing,” said Catherine Baber. “The net is being cast wider than ever before. We fear the Chinese authorities seem to be moving the goal posts to treat any peaceful expression of support for reform as ‘subversion’.”