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China must reveal whereabouts of Ai Weiwei's associates

Three of artist Ai Weiwei's associates are still missing, presumed in secret detention, despite the conditional release of Ai and his cousin into house arrest, Amnesty International said today.

The Chinese authorities have refused to provide any information about the whereabouts of Wen Tao, Hu Mingfen and Liu Zhenggang since they went missing in early April, the same week that their employer and associate Ai Weiwei was detained without charge.

The desperate families of the missing three even attempted to persuade police to open kidnapping investigations to locate them, after months of silence from the authorities.

"The longer these three are missing, the more we fear for their safety, especially given that Ai Weiwei himself has already been released on bail," said Catherine Baber, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for the Asia-Pacific.

"The international outcry around Ai's detention should not neglect the others caught up in the 'Jasmine arrests'. It is the least famous among them who are at the most risk. The Chinese authorities have to reveal the whereabouts of Wen Tao, Hu Mingfen and Liu Zhenggang, and release them immediately if, like Ai Weiwei, they have not been charged with any crime."

Ai Weiwei was released on bail on 22 June and his driver Zhang Jinsong – also his cousin - was released the following day. Both appear to be subject to house arrest and are unable yet to discuss the conditions of their detention.

Zhang, like his three co-workers, had been held incommunicado with no information released about his whereabouts to his family or to lawyers.

Wen Tao was Ai Weiwei's assistant, Hu Mingfen his accountant, and Liu Zhenggang a designer.

Ai Weiwei and his business associates were just a few of least 130 activists, lawyers, bloggers and low level 'netizens' who have been detained, harassed and imprisoned within their homes since February.

The sweeping action against dissenters has been prompted by government fears of a 'Jasmine Revolution' inspired by the Middle East and North Africa.