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China: Christmas crackdown against activists continues

The Chinese authorities must immediately release prominent women's rights activist Ni Yulan, who faces several years in jail when her trial starts on 29 December, Amnesty International said today.

Ni Yulan is the third activist that Amnesty International is aware of to be tried over the past few weeks, as the Chinese authorities crackdown on individuals they perceive to be a threat.

For more than a decade, Ni Yulan has campaigned against forced evictions and other rights violations in China. She has been charged, along with her husband, Dong Jiqin, with "picking quarrels and making trouble" and "fraud."

"The Chinese government seems to be doing its best to put anyone they deem a threat behind bars over the holiday season, when many people around the world are distracted by festivities," said Sam Zarifi, Amnesty International's Asia Pacific Director.

"The authorities are using vague charges and unfair trials to quickly do away with so-called troublemakers before the unprecedented leadership transition in 2012, that will see the majority of members of China's most powerful decision-making bodies replaced with a new generation of leaders."

On 23 December, a court sentenced another prominent activist, Chen Wei, to nine years in prison for writing and distributing essays critical of the Communist Party. On 26 December, activist Chen Xi was sentenced to 10 years in prison for forming a human rights discussion group.

Over the past 10 years the authorities have continued to subject Ni Yulan to harassment, detention and torture. When she was detained in 2002, her knee caps and feet were broken. Her injuries were so severe that she remains in a wheel chair.

"The Chinese authorities have made Ni Yulan's life unbearable, subjecting her to detention and beatings that have left her unable to walk," said Sam Zarifi. "The Chinese government must immediately release Ni Yulan, and her husband, and bring an end to their persecution."

According to her lawyer, Ni Yulan is to stand trial at Beijing Xicheng North District People's Court. She faces charges of "fraud" for allegedly providing legal advice without a lawyer's license to people across China who faced forced eviction and other housing rights violations.

Ni Yulan's husband, Dong Jiqin, who has consistently supported his wife's work on human rights, will also be put on trial for "picking quarrels and making trouble."

The couple were detained on 7 April 2011 and formally arrested on 13 and 15 April. They have only been allowed to meet with their lawyers two or three times since their detention.

Ni Yulan's health has deteriorated during this time. She suffers from injuries sustained while being

tortured during previous detentions as well as other health issues.

Ni Yulan's daughter, Dong Xuan, told Amnesty International, "The authorities can destroy my mother's record of education and question her lawyer's license, but they cannot destroy the work my mother has done for people or ignore the torture, detention and imprisonment she has suffered over the years for that work."

Background

Ni Yulan is herself a victim of forced eviction. Since 2001, she has defended people's housing rights in China and has been detained three times at length for her work.

In 2002, as Ni Yulan was filming the demolition of a Beijing home, authorities took her to a nearby police station and tortured her for several days, breaking her feet and kneecaps. Her injuries were so severe that she remains in a wheel chair.

When Ni Yulan attempted to petition the authorities over the beatings, she was arrested, convicted of "obstructing official business," and sentenced to one year in prison. Her husband, Dong Jiqin, was barred from attending her trial.

After her release in 2003, Ni Yulan continued fighting for the rights of people facing eviction ahead of the 2008 Beijing Olympics. She was arrested and imprisoned for two years in 2008 just before the Olympics while trying to stop the demolition of her own home. She was tortured and suffered from other ill-treatment during the prison time and was denied adequate medical care.

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