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China: Free human rights activist jailed after unfair trial

Amnesty International called on the Chinese authorities to release human rights activist Tan Zuoren, who was sentenced to 5 years in prison today for “inciting subversion of state power.”

Tan Zuoren was convicted for criticizing the Chinese Communist Party and the government through his articles and diaries posted on-line and on overseas websites concerning the authorities' handling of the Tiananmen crackdown in 1989 .

“His arrest, unfair trial and now the guilty verdict are further disturbing examples of how the Chinese authorities use vague and over broad laws to silence and punish dissenting voices,” said Roseann Rife, Asia-Pacific Deputy Director at Amnesty International.

“The Chinese authorities cannot continue to claim that they are dealing with human rights defenders according to the law when they violate so many of their own legal procedures in cases like this.”

The verdict was announced this morning by the Chengdu City Intermediate People’s Court in China.

Tan Zuoren’s wife, Wang Qinghua, protested the conviction and told Amnesty International that “even one day of imprisonment is too much. He only exercised his freedom of expression and addressed corruption from his own conscience.”

Tan Zuoren’s trial on 12 August was grossly unfair and disregarded China’s criminal procedure law. His lawyers reported they were unable to call their witnesses to testify in court or show the video footage they prepared, and they were unable to present their defence.

One of the defense witnesses, internationally acclaimed artist Ai Weiwei, was beaten and illegally detained by individuals in uniform claiming to be police for hours until after the trial ended.

Two Hong Kong journalists were prevented from covering his trial when local police detained them in their hotel room under the guise of searching for drugs. Police barred supporters of Tan Zuoren from the courtroom, allowing only his wife and one of his daughters, from attending the trial. Court officials filled the rest of the seats. Journalists were again harassed today trying to cover the story at the court.

The Court also violated criminal procedure law by delaying the verdict for four months with no explanation to Tan Zuoren’s lawyers.

“By silencing human rights defenders the Chinese authorities are denying society an open and transparent debate and rejecting the concept of accountability. The calls for justice will only become louder as more

human rights activists are sentenced,” said Roseann Rife.