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China: Activists under threat after Obama visit

Chinese authorities must stop the harassment and arbitrary detention of dozens of human rights lawyers and activists who were targeted during US President Obama's visit to the country earlier this week, Amnesty International said today.

Security forces have kept dozens of lawyers and activists under house arrest or under surveillance during President Obama's visit and prevented them from having any contact with foreign journalists reporting on the visit.

"It is a very negative sign that the Chinese government now actually steps up its repressive tactics during sensitive public events," said Sam Zarifi, Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific director.

"This is a clear signal to China's civil society, as well as to the United States, that the Chinese government will not abide by its international human rights obligations even when it knows the whole world is watching." Said Sam Zarifi.

On the morning of November 19th Jiang Tianyong, a lawyer, was blocked by police at the gate of his home in Beijing's Haidian district as he was walking his daughter to school. Jiang had just returned from the US two days earlier.

Jiang Tianyong was held for 13 hours and questioned by police in Yangfangdian district police station near his home in Beijing.

The police did not provide him with any documentation authorizing his detention. When Jiang challenged the lawfulness of his detention the police told him that he was held for "attacking the police".

Police also questioned his seven year-old daughter at school while he was in custody. He was released on November 19th, but the police told him that "the issue is not ended yet". On the morning of November 20th at least six police officers were stationed at the gate to Jiang Tianyong's house. The police initially blocked him from leaving but relented after negotiation.

"The Chinese government's intimidation and harassment of lawyers and activists shows a complete disregard for human rights, the law and legal professionals," said Sam Zarifi. "These are not the actions of a government that is committed to the rule of law."

Other human rights lawyers including Li Xiongbing, Li Heping and Mo Shaoping also faced harassment, with three or four police officers stationed in front of their homes. Some of the police officers remain outside the lawyers' homes.

Before President Obama's visit to the country many activist and petitioners complained of state intimidation with police being posted outside their homes in Shanghai, Beijing and elsewhere in the country.

During the visit, some activists were escorted out of Beijing or were held in unofficial places of detention often known as "black jails".

Human rights activist and lawyers in China face violations of their own human rights, including torture and other ill-treatment, intimidation and arbitrary detention for their peaceful human rights work.