

# URGENT ACTION

## CHINESE DIRECTOR ARRESTED FOR PROTEST FILM

Chen Pinlin is the director of the documentary 'Urumqi Middle Road' (乌鲁木齐中路), which captures scenes from the nationwide "White Paper Movement", a series of peaceful protests against three years of rolling lockdowns under China's zero-COVID policy and the harsh environment of censorship and surveillance in China. Chen uploaded the documentary to the Internet around the one-year anniversary of the White Paper Movement. He was arrested on 5 January 2024 and is being held in the Baoshan Detention Center in Shanghai on charges of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble". Chen may face five years in prison if convicted.

### TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

**Chief Procurator Chen Yong**  
Shanghai People's Procuratorate  
75 Jian'guo West Rd, Shanghai, 200020  
People's Republic of China

Dear Chief Procurator Chen,

In 2022-2023, Chen Pinlin (陈品霖), also known as Plato, created and released the documentary called 'Urumqi Middle Road' (乌鲁木齐中路). This documentary records a series of peaceful protests against three years of rolling lockdowns under China's zero-COVID policy and the harsh environment of censorship and surveillance in China.

I am writing to express my grave concern for Chen's well-being. On 5 January 2024, police in Shanghai arrested him for "picking quarrels and provoking trouble"; on 18 February, his case was transferred to the prosecutor's office for prosecution. Chen is currently being held in pre-trial detention at the Baoshan Detention Center in Shanghai. While in custody, Chen is at risk of torture and other ill-treatment, as well as violations of his due process rights. In the last decade, Amnesty International has documented a number of cases in China in which individuals held on these charges, often for their work to uphold freedom of expression and defend other human rights, have experienced torture and other ill-treatment and been unable to access effective remedy for those violations.

Chen's family has reportedly been harassed and intimidated by the police, which is also a common trend with cases of detained defenders in China. Since the White Paper Movement, several other participants or their families have been harassed and questioned by Chinese authorities. It is difficult to know exactly how many individuals have been silenced, arrested or even disappeared in efforts by authorities to control information about the protests and further limit fundamental freedoms.

Chen Pinlin is being detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression, a right guaranteed under international human rights law. Therefore, I urge you to:

- Release Chen Pinlin immediately and unconditionally;
- Pending his release, ensure he is not subjected to torture and other ill-treatment while in detention;
- Stop threatening, harassing, and arresting Chen's family, other individuals associated with the White Paper Movement, and anyone who peacefully exercises their rights to freedom of expression and association.

Yours sincerely,

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

During the White Paper Movement, Chen and his friends shot a large number of videos at Urumqi Middle Road, the site of a large protest in Shanghai. Around the first anniversary of the White Paper Movement in November 2023, Chen finalized and uploaded his footage as a documentary called *Urumqi Middle Road*, also called *Not the Foreign Force*, to the Internet. At the end of this movie, Chen left this narration:

*Some people say, what is the point of protesting on the streets? In the end, it's still the same, suppressed, shielded and misinterpreted. But as Churchill said, 'Courage is the most important human trait, with courage, other human traits can naturally be possessed' We lacked experience and have been cowardly and wavering, but today we have the courage to stand up and to speak out. What we lacked this time, we can do better next time. If it were to do it again, I would still choose to be there. Because a government that is afraid of even a white paper can't defeat the justice in the hearts of the people.*

In late November 2023, Chen Pinlin was detained by the Chinese authorities for “picking quarrels and provoking trouble”. On 5 January 2024, Chen was formally arrested on the same charge; he is currently being held at the Baoshan Detention Center. On 18 February, his case was transferred to the prosecutor's office for prosecution.

This is the second case of arrest for sharing information about the White Paper Movement that Amnesty International has been able to document. The first was that of a Uyghur university student Kamile Wayit; information about her case is available [here](#). Amnesty believes that this is only the tip of the iceberg, and that many more reports of detention, arrest or disappearance linked to the protests in November 2022 may be credible. Due to the swift and harsh response of authorities, however, the true number and scope of cases linked to the White Paper Movement is likely impossible to determine.

Amnesty has documented torture and ill-treatment in places of detention in China since at least 2015, with the report [No end in sight - Torture and forced confessions in China](#), and most recently in the China entry of the [2023 Annual Report](#).

### About the White Paper Movement or “A4 Protest” in China

On 24 November 2022, a fire broke out in an apartment building in Urumqi, killing at least 10 people, according to government sources. Many blamed Covid-19 restrictions for the deaths but local authorities disputed this claim. This did not stop protests from breaking out in Urumqi, the capital of the western region of Xinjiang. After the fire, the government declared that the Covid-19 outbreak was under control and the city would ease lockdowns, following more than 100 days of severe restrictions on people's movement.

On 25 November, a student from the Nanjing Media College reportedly protested on campus holding a white sheet of paper, and was joined by other students. The action quickly spread across the country, with videos shared on social media showing protests breaking out across universities and cities throughout China, including in Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai and Wuhan.

Peaceful protesters commemorated the victims of the Urumqi fire and called for the easing of lockdown measures. Many also demanded the end of censorship and some even called for President Xi to step down. A large number of people were detained for participating in these peaceful protests. It is unclear how many were detained, and whether any remain in detention today, nearly 18 months later. Videos circulated online show police forces beating protesters during the arrests.

The White Paper Movement was also characterized by the transnational nature of the protests, with overseas Chinese students often demonstrating in solidarity with peers in the country. For the one-year anniversary, Amnesty International shared for [the stories of six participants](#) on how the White Paper Movement changed their lives.

**PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET:** English or Chinese

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL:** 30 June 2024. Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

**NAME AND PRONOUN:** Chen Pinlin (he/him)

**LINK TO PREVIOUS UA:** n/a