

# URGENT ACTION

## JOURNALIST WHO INVESTIGATED COVID-19 RE-DETAINED

Zhang Zhan is currently detained at the Pudong New District Detention Centre in Shanghai on charges of 'picking quarrels and provoking trouble'. She has been targeted for her continued advocacy for human rights following her release from prison on 13 May 2024. Her family has also faced intimidation and threats from the authorities, while the lawyer her family wished to appoint was held for several hours by police.

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

**Director Ma Xuebo,**  
Pudong Branch of the Shanghai Public Security Bureau,  
655 Dingxiang Road,  
Pudong, Shanghai 200120  
People's Republic of China

Dear Director Ma,

I am writing to express my grave concern for citizen journalist **Zhang Zhan (张展)**, who is currently detained at Pudong New District Detention Centre on charges of 'picking quarrels and provoking trouble' (寻衅滋事罪). These charges are baseless; she has merely exercised her right to freedom of expression and to defend the rights of others.

Efforts by her family to arrange a lawyer have been unsuccessful. After meeting with her family, human rights lawyer Fan Biaowen was taken away by Shanghai police and held in custody for nearly eight hours before being released. Zhang's family have also faced intimidation and threats from the authorities to prevent them from disclosing details of Zhang Zhan's case to the international community.

Such treatment is deeply concerning given that it comes mere months following her release from prison, after serving an unjust four-year sentence, on 13 May 2024.

In late August, it was reported that she had been taken into custody by police from Shanghai, well over 1000 km away from Gansu, the northwestern province in China. Prior to this, she had been regularly and repeatedly taken in for police questioning while in Shanghai, with some interrogations lasting over 10 hours.

As of 8 October, Zhang Zhan has been detained for over 37 days. Under China's Criminal Procedure Law (CPL), authorities can detain a person for a maximum of 37 days, after which they must either formally arrest, apply a different article of the CPL, or release them. The lack of further information from law enforcement or judicial authorities raises serious concerns about the legality of her situation and about the risks she may face while in custody, including of torture and other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment.

**I therefore call on you to:**

- **Release Zhang Zhan immediately and unconditionally;**
- **Pending her release, ensure that Zhang Zhan has regular, unrestricted access to family and is not subject to torture or other ill-treatment;**
- **Ensure Zhang Zhan has regular, unrestricted access to the lawyers of her or her family's choice, and that these lawyers can exercise their rights to defend her effectively.**
- **Stop harassing and threatening her family and other human rights defenders who are supporting this case;**

Yours sincerely,

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Zhang Zhan is a Chinese citizen journalist who was jailed for reporting on the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic in Wuhan.

A former lawyer, she travelled to Wuhan in February 2020 to provide on-the-ground information about what was happening there. She posted on social media about how government officials detained independent reporters and harassed families of Covid-19 patients.

She went missing in Wuhan in May 2020. It later emerged that she had been taken by the Chinese authorities and detained in Shanghai, where she was convicted of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble" after a sham trial. While in prison, Zhang carried out a partial hunger strike to protest her guilty verdict. This led to serious impacts on her health, resulting in multiple hospitalizations. According to a lawyer who spoke to her family, in July 2023 she was again admitted to the prison hospital, with worrying long-term health impacts and weighing just 37 kilograms – half of her weight prior to her deprivation of liberty.

On 13 May 2024, after completing a four-year prison sentence, Zhang Zhan was released. However, since her release, she has been subjected to strict surveillance and continuous harassment by the authorities. Zhang Zhan expressed concern that her online speech was being monitored by authorities.

In late August, it was reported that she travelled from Shanghai to the northwestern province of Gansu to show solidarity with other human rights defenders. Shortly thereafter, during a visit to her hometown in Shaanxi, she suddenly became unreachable. Later on, it was reported that she had been taken into custody by police from Shanghai, well over 1000 km away from her last known location. Since then, Zhang Zhan has been criminally detained by the Chinese authorities, according to civil society on charges of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble", and is currently held in the Pudong Detention Centre in Shanghai. She has been detained for over a month.

Zhang Zhan is imprisoned solely for exercising her human right to freedom of expression. She was featured in Amnesty International's [2021 Write for Rights campaign](#).

Since the outbreak of Covid-19 in Wuhan, China's suppression of freedom of expression has become increasingly rampant. Amnesty International has documented numerous cases of independent journalists and activists who were sentenced for reporting on the truth of the pandemic, with Zhang Zhan being a notable example. These repressive measures intensified after the "White Paper Movement," leading to further restrictions on civil society. Human rights defenders, including woman protesters, independent journalists, human rights lawyers, and academics, are at risk of severe penalties under various charges related to "endangering national security."

Even after serving their full sentences, human rights defenders face limited freedom, with ongoing harassment and rights deprivation affecting them and their families. We have recorded several cases of human rights defenders who, despite being released, still do not enjoy complete freedom. For instance, human rights lawyer Jiang Tianyong was under house arrest after his release and has been unable to reunite with his family for over 11 years. Another human rights lawyer, Wang Quanzhang, continues to face forced evictions and threats against his children's education even after his release.

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

You can also write in your own language.

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL:** 28 May 2025. Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

**NAME AND PRONOUN:** Zhang Zhan (She/her)

**LINK TO PREVIOUS UA:** This is the first UA since her release