

URGENT ACTION

JOURNALIST RISKS RE-DETENTION FOR BASELESS CHARGES

After one year in detention, Chinese journalist Zhang Zhan is scheduled to stand trial on 19 September 2025 on the charge of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble.” This will be the second time that Zhang has been charged with the same offense, for which she previously served four years in prison. According to the available indictment, the Pudong New District People’s Procuratorate has recommended a sentence of four to five years. Reports raise serious concerns about her health and treatment in detention.

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

*Secretary Zhu Zhongming,
Secretary of the Political and Legal Affairs Committee of the CPC Shanghai Municipal Committee
No. 9 Wanping Road
Shanghai 200030
People’s Republic of China*

Dear Secretary Zhu,

*I am writing to express my grave concern for journalist and human rights defender **Zhang Zhan (张展)**, who is facing trial at the Pudong New District People’s Court on charge of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” (寻衅滋事罪) — the same accusation for which she was previously imprisoned. Again, these charges are baseless; she has merely exercised her right to freedom of expression and to defend the rights of others.*

The trial comes more than a year after her re-arrest, and prosecutors have reportedly recommended a sentence of four to five years. This is particularly alarming given that Zhang had been released in May 2024, after already completing a four-year sentence handed down in 2020 for her independent reporting from Wuhan during the pandemic. After only three months of freedom, she was detained again, and is now being held in the same detention centre and tried in the same court as before.

Zhang has reportedly gone on hunger strike in detention and may have been forcibly fed. Her family and lawyer have also been reported to face serious harassment and intimidation by authorities, and her current health status is unknown — a serious cause for concern. During her previous imprisonment, she went on a partial hunger strike that led to multiple hospitalizations and her weight dropped drastically to just 37 kilograms — half of what she weighed prior to her deprivation of liberty.

I therefore call on you to:

- ***Release Zhang Zhan immediately and unconditionally;***
- ***Pending her release, ensure that Zhang Zhan is not subject to torture or other ill-treatment, and that she has adequate access to qualified health professionals providing health care in compliance with medical ethics, including the principles of confidentiality, autonomy, and informed consent;***
- ***Ensure that she has regular, unrestricted access to her family and lawyers, and stop harassing and threatening them and other human rights defenders who are supporting this case.***

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Zhang Zhan is a Chinese 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, during her short time of freedom, she was subjected to strict surveillance and continuous harassment by the authorities. Zhang Zhan expressed concern that her online speech had been monitored by authorities.

In late August 2024, 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 arbitrarily 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](#).

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 12 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 February 2026. 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 - Zhang is her surname, Zhan is her given name)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa17/8659/2024/en/>