

URGENT ACTION

COVID-19 ACTIVIST HELD INCOMMUNICADO FOR MONTHS

No contact has been made with human rights defender Chen Mei since he was taken away by police in Beijing on 19 April 2020. Not knowing anything about his condition or whereabouts for nearly two months, Chen's family were finally told on 12 June that he is being detained at Chaoyang Detention Centre in Beijing on criminal charges of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble". Chen remains detained incommunicado and, without access to a lawyer of his choice, is at grave risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

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

Director Wang Xiaohong
Beijingshi Gong'anju
9 Dongdajie, Qianmen
Dongchengqu, Beijing Shi 100017
People Republic of China
Fax: +86 10 8522 2823

Dear Director Wang:

I am writing to express my ongoing concern for **Chen Mei (陈玫)**, one of the contributors to Terminus2049 (端点星计划) taken away by police on 19 April 2020. It is distressing to learn that Chen's family only received information about his whereabouts 54 days after being taken into police custody. According to information provided by the authorities, Chen is understood to be detained at Chaoyang Detention Centre in Beijing on charges of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble" (寻衅滋事罪).

Terminus2049 (端点星计划) was a project working to archive articles related to the COVID-19 outbreak in China earlier this year. It is upsetting to learn that Chen Mei seems to have been arrested simply for collecting and archiving public information, especially as freedom to information is an integral part of the right to freedom of expression as recognized in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

Furthermore, I find it very worrying that Chen's family-appointed lawyer has not been granted permission to meet with Chen, despite having already submitted the necessary application documents. The failure to ensure Chen Mei's access to his family during his detention has apparently resulted in his being unaware that they arranged legal representation for him and seriously hindered his ability to seek protection of his rights.

With no access to a lawyer, or any information about Chen Mei's condition, I am gravely concerned that he is at risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

I therefore call on you to:

- **Release Chen Mei immediately and unconditionally unless there is sufficient credible and admissible evidence that he has committed an internationally recognized offence and is granted a fair trial in line with international standards;**
- **Pending his release, ensure that Chen Mei has regular, unrestricted access to family and lawyers of his choice and is not subjected to torture and other ill-treatment;**

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

After Chen Mei had been missing for 54 days, his family finally received a call from Chaoyang District police station in Beijing, on 12 June. Police informed Chen's family that he was being detained at Chaoyang Detention Centre under the criminal charge of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble", which carries a maximum sentence of five years' imprisonment. During the same call, Chen Mei's family was told that Chen had voluntarily applied for free legal aid and that the appointed lawyers might contact them. Chen's mother told the person on the phone that they did not need a legal-aid lawyer because the family had already appointed a lawyer for Chen after he was arrested in April 2020. However, the person asked her to respect Chen's decision.

One of the legal-aid lawyers contacted the family on 15 June. Chen's family reiterated that their services were not needed, as they had already arranged a lawyer for Chen. However, the lawyers refused to withdraw from Chen's case. It was only after Chen's family made a public announcement, stating that the legal aid lawyers were not needed, did the lawyers finally withdraw from the case on 24 June 2020.

On 19 April 2020, Chen Mei (陈政), Cai Wei (蔡伟) and Cai's girlfriend, surnamed Tang (唐), were taken away by police in Beijing and placed under "residential surveillance in a designated location" (指定居所监视居住) on suspicion of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble" (寻衅滋事罪). Tang was released on bail on 13 May 2020. Cai Wei's family was also notified by the authorities that he is being held at Chaoyang Detention Centre in Beijing on criminal charges of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble".

As with Chen Mei, Cai Wei's family members were also told that Cai had applied for free legal service and that two lawyers had been appointed over objections from Cai's family.

Chen and Cai were involved with Terminus2049 (端点星计划), an online project working to archive articles that have been removed from mainstream media outlets and social media by state censorship, including many related to COVID-19. After the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in China, numerous articles relating to the virus were censored, including ones published by mainstream media organizations such as a subsidiary of *Beijing Youth Daily* and *Caijing*. Certain social media posts, sensitive hashtags and demands for free speech have all been quickly deleted or censored.

There have been many reports of independent journalists and activists having been harassed by authorities for sharing information about COVID-19 on social media. These include outspoken lawyer and citizen journalist Chen Qiushi, who reported being harassed by the authorities after posting footage from hospitals in Wuhan, and Wuhan resident Fang Bin, who was briefly taken away by the authorities in February 2020 after posting a video purporting to show corpses of COVID-19 victims.

The crime of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble" (寻衅滋事) under Article 293 of the Chinese Criminal Law is a broadly defined and vaguely worded offence that has increasingly been used to target activists and human rights defenders. Although the crime originally applied to acts that disrupted order in public places, but since 2013 the scope has expanded to include online space as well.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English or Chinese

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 26 August 2020

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Chen Mei (He/Him)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa17/2289/2020/en/>