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China: Chen pledge ‘empty’

A pledge by China that it will allow Chen Guangcheng to go abroad with his family so he can study seems empty as long as the Chinese state keeps the activist's wider family in detention and retaliates against his supporters, Amnesty International said.

Against the background of a US pronouncement that China's promise is “encouraging” Catherine Baber, Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific Deputy Director, said:

"The disparity between high level assurances and the reality on the ground is stark.

"While China and the US negotiated on Chen and his family, Chinese authorities were targeting his friends and supporters - including beating Jiang Tianyong, a lawyer who tried to visit Chen at hospital in Beijing.

"We're hopeful but not reassured by the latest deal emerging for Chen Guangcheng. The fate of Chen and his family is far from certain, given that they are not yet safe and free.

"The hurried negotiations earlier this week have partly led to the uncertainty surrounding Chen's fate. The US must tell the world exactly what the Chinese government has promised regarding Chen and his family, who made those promises, and, crucially, what concrete steps the US will take to ensure that Chen Guangcheng and his family can lead the life they want to live.

"The Chinese government has proven over and over that they have no regard for Chen Guangcheng's safety or freedom. For more than seven years, this man has been either under illegal house arrest or in prison for no reason other than trying to use the law to protect the legal rights - and human rights - of his fellow Chinese.

"The Chinese authorities have already acted in bad faith more than once this week.

"The US and other governments must demand that the Chinese government's retaliation against Chen's wider family and network of supporters stops now.

"Chen's older brother is believed to be in police custody while the whereabouts of his nephew and mother are unknown.

"The Chinese authorities must also honour their commitment to both Chen and the US to thoroughly and impartially investigate his claims of abuse while under illegal house arrest in Shandong province, and ensure the results of any investigation are made public."