

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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China: End further persecution of legal activists

Amnesty International condemns the formal arrest of legal activists Xu Zhiyong and Zhuang Lu on suspicion of “tax evasion” and call for their immediate and unconditional release.

The charges of tax evasion are a simple ploy to shut down the Open Constitution Initiative (OCI, also known as *Gongmeng* in Chinese). Attempts to pay the fine were rebuffed by authorities allowing for the continued arbitrary detention of Xu Zhiyong and Zhuang Lu. After their detention, OCI’s lawyer Li Xiongbing and researcher Wang Gongquan went to the national and Beijing tax bureaus on 10 August in an attempt to pay the fine. The authorities refused to accept it and claimed that Li Xiongbing and Wang Gongquan were not the legal representatives of OCI and that they failed present an authorization letter signed by OCI’s detained legal representative Xu Zhiyong.

On 14 July 2009, OCI received notices from the national and Beijing taxation bureaus ordering it to pay a fine of 1.42 million yuan for tax violations, an amount that is five times the taxes that the authorities said OCI escaped. Three days later, on 17 July, representatives from the Beijing Civil Affairs Bureau came to OCI’s office and took away computers and other office machines, as well as files and documents. They also delivered an official decision to shut down the law research center, saying that it is not allowed to operate because it did not register as a civil society organization. In the early morning of 29 July, police officers took Xu Zhiyong and Zhuang Lu away from their homes.

Since its establishment in 2003, OCI has provided legal assistance to victims of human rights violations including those of forced evictions and families of victims of the scandal around poisoned milk. It recently used the national Regulation on Open Government Information to request various government branches to be transparent about their spending of public money.

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