

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **China: Independent inquiry must be launched into death in custody of former Vice-Mayor of Harbin, Zhu Shengwen**

***"We sincerely hope that my husband's blood can awaken the conscience of the people and can help to push forward reform of the legal system. We want the abolition of torture in detention and the respect of people's rights in every way",*** Fan Zhen, wife of Zhu Shengwen.

Amnesty International today sent a letter to the Prime Minister of China, Wen Jiabao, urging his administration to conduct a full, independent and impartial investigation into the death in custody of Zhu Shengwen, former Vice-Mayor of Harbin. Zhu Shengwen was serving a 17-year prison sentence in Harbin No.3 Prison after being convicted of corruption in April 1998.

According to official Chinese news sources, Zhu Shengwen died on 29 December 2003 after jumping out of a medical centre window. He had been taken there for an examination to assess his eligibility for medical parole. Zhu Shengwen's death has officially been termed a suicide, but his family have strongly disputed this version of events. They have stated that he was looking forward to the possibility of parole and that his behaviour did not suggest that he was suicidal.

In its letter, Amnesty International also highlights its concern that Zhu Shengwen's detailed account of having been tortured in pre-trial detention between October 1996 and April 1998 has apparently not been investigated to date.

During his trial at the Harbin Intermediate People's Court in April 1998, Zhu Shengwen reportedly contested the charges against him, suggesting that he was a victim of a political framing. In a written statement to the court, he stated that during interrogation he had been punched and kicked, and given repeated shocks with an electric baton in order to force him to confess. No investigation into these serious allegations of torture is known to have been carried out, and the court proceeded to convict and sentence him, apparently using his confession as "evidence".

"A failure to investigate and bring alleged perpetrators of torture or ill-treatment to justice contravenes China's obligations under international human rights standards, including the UN Convention against Torture ratified by China in 1988," Amnesty International said.

"It also compounds the grief and injustice felt by Zhu Shengwen's family, who have suffered the deep distress caused by the death in custody of a relative, exacerbated by the fact that he may have been wrongly convicted in the first place."

There are concerns that others detained in connection with this case may also have been tortured or ill-treated. They include Zhu Shengwen's wife, Fan Zhen, who was detained for two years between October 1996 and October 1998 for failing to report her husband's alleged crimes. She later stated that she had been locked in an iron chair with hands and feet shackled, and subjected to verbal abuse and threats.

In view of these serious allegations of torture and other human rights violations, Amnesty International urges that any inquiry conducted into Zhu Shengwen's death be broad and wide-ranging. It should not be confined to the immediate circumstances of his death, but should encompass all alleged violations of international human rights standards from the start of Zhu Shengwen's detention onwards, including his prolonged incommunicado detention, the trial proceedings against him, the conditions of his imprisonment and the circumstances of his death. It should also investigate whether others may have been subjected to torture, ill-treatment or other abuses in connection with the same case.

"All those suspected of committing acts of torture or other human rights violations should be brought to justice in line with international legal standards of fair trial", Amnesty International concluded.

For further information on this case, please see:

China's chance to enforce the rule of law - investigate alleged torture of Vice-Mayor (AI Index: ASA 17/019/1998), available at:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/engasa170191998>

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566  
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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