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China: Activist Feng Zhenghu victim of enforced disappearance

The Chinese government should immediately reveal the whereabouts of prominent human rights defender Feng Zhenghu, whose detention by security forces in Beijing on 15 February ago has just come to light. In the 40 days that he has been held by the authorities, neither his whereabouts or the charges against him have been made public.

“Feng is a victim of enforced disappearance and as such is particularly vulnerable to torture and ill-treatment,” said Roseann Rife, Amnesty International’s Asia-Pacific Deputy Director. “Chinese authorities should immediately allow him to meet his family and lawyers; he should either be released immediately or charged with a recognizable crime.”

Feng Zhenghu was detained in Beijing by seven Shanghai police as he was accompanying a victim of forced eviction to a meeting with a lawyer. The police forced him into a car outside the Guobin Hotel near Buwai Dajie. Feng Zhengfu was taken back to Shanghai on 16 February. He was able to call his brother on the telephone on the way to Shanghai but has not been heard from since.

Feng Zhenghu’s family went to a police station near their home in Shanghai on 20 February and asked for his whereabouts but was given no answer. On 12 March, nearly one month after Feng Zhengfu was taken away, Shanghai internal security police (guobao) requested his wife’s cooperation to prevent him from meeting or helping petitioners in the future. The internal security police officers accepted his family’s request to send some clothes to him. However, in violation of China’s Criminal Procedure Law, they refused to inform the family of Feng Zhenghu’s whereabouts and what charges he was facing.

“It is a disgrace that Chinese law enforcement agencies disobey the law in such a blatant manner,” said Roseann Rife. “According to Chinese legal procedure Feng Zhenghu should have access to a lawyer and his family should know where and why he is detained.”

Feng Zhenghu’s abduction follows the detention of human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng, who has not been heard from since 4 February, when he was taken away from his Shaanxi home by more than 10 security agents. His family fled China earlier this year because of the continued harassment and intense surveillance the entire family was experiencing.

“Given the horrible torture that Gao Zhisheng experienced during his previous detention in 2007, he may be in grave danger now,” said Roseann Rife. “The Chinese authorities should reveal the whereabouts of Gao Zhisheng and Feng Zhenghu and ensure they are not being subjected to any forms of torture or ill-treatment at the hands of state agencies or non-state actors.”

Background

Feng Zhenghu, 54, was the director of the China Enterprise Research Centre which published articles in 1989 as the army started to enter Beijing predicting a possible crackdown on the pro-democratic movement. After that, Feng Zhenghu was questioned and ordered to leave the research centre.

In 2001, he was convicted of “illegal business activity” and sentenced to three years’ imprisonment. Since his release in 2004, he has been writing economic critiques, focusing on the malpractice of the local government and forced evictions. Many Shanghai petitioners who suffered consequences of the economic development approached Feng Zhenghu and asked for his help to seek justice. He documented their cases and helped them find lawyers to lodge lawsuits.

Gao Zhisheng was convicted of “inciting subversion, after a closed trial, and sentenced to a three-year prison sentence, suspended for five years as well as a one year subsequent deprivation of political rights in December 2006. He has been kept under constant surveillance since he was sentenced, in a manner that goes far beyond what is allowed in Chinese Criminal Law for those serving suspended sentences and has been forcibly removed from his home at least twice during this period and placed under detention where he has experienced ill-treatment and torture.