

I am writing to you in order to express my concern regarding the detention and conviction of the Chinese barefoot lawyer Chen Guangcheng. He has been detained since March 11, 2006, and is currently being held in Linyi City Prison, Shandong Province, China. Chen was charged with “damaging public property and gathering people to block traffic,” and sentenced to four years and three months’ imprisonment in August 2006.

Chen was born in 1971 and has been blind since childhood. He is a barefoot lawyer and activist in Shandong Province who has fought for the rights of a variety of people, particularly in rural China. Chen has provided legal advice to farmers and disabled people, assisting them in protecting their rights. However, a recent class action lawsuit that he filed against the city of Linyi over official abuse of the family planning policy led to his current detention.

During his time in prison, he has reportedly been beaten by police officers as well as fellow inmates, and has experienced other inhumane treatment. He has undertaken hunger strikes in protest of this treatment. During Chen’s detention and trial, various members of his legal team were harassed and his family also experienced reprisals. For additional information concerning Chen’s work and his arrest and conviction, please refer to his webpage through the Human Rights in China Incorporating Responsibility 2008 Campaign, at <http://www.ir2008.org/>.

This case (and other similar cases) should be an issue of great concern to a professional organization like yours that represents lawyers and supports the rule of law. The ability to practice law independently and professionally must be respected. Lawyers should not be subjected to harassment, beatings, or deprivations of liberty while representing clients. Furthermore, legal practitioners and their clients should be guaranteed procedural protections, including the right to meet and prepare a client’s defense.

We urge you to write to the President of the People’s Republic of China, Hu Jintao, to ask for Chen’s release. Additionally, we ask you to make a public statement in support of Chen Guangcheng denouncing his detention and urging the Chinese authorities to allow lawyers to practice without fear of reprisals or prosecution. Your voice, which represents the legal profession, is powerful and will add to the pressure to release Chen and support Chinese lawyers.

Sincerely,

**Reference contact information:**

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President of the People's Republic of China  
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