

President Hu Jintao

President of the People's Republic of China

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People's Republic of China

is writing to express our concern regarding the detention and conviction of the barefoot lawyer Chen Guangcheng. He has been detained since March 11, 2006 and is currently being held in Linyi City Prison, Shandong Province. 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.

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.

urges you to immediately release Chen Guangcheng without condition. Chen is being arbitrarily detained for carrying out his legitimate work as a legal practitioner. The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, in its 48th session, determined that Chen’s detention was arbitrary and that he should be released. The Government of the People’s Republic of China should heed the concerns of the international legal community and release Chen Guangcheng.

Sincerely,