

[Human Rights Council must demand release of detained Chinese human rights defender](#)

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The UN Human Rights Council should demand the release of detained Chinese human rights defender Cao Shunli when it meets in Geneva next week and press China to ensure that she receives access to specialist medical treatment following a critical deterioration in her health.



(Update - 7 March 2014) - In line with ISHR's calls, Switzerland raised the case of Cao Shunli in the Human Rights Council on 7 March.

Swiss Ambassador to the UN Alexandre Fasel told the Council that Switzerland is particularly concerned with the harassment, criminalisation and detention of human rights defenders in China. Switzerland further noted its specific concern with the grave case of Cao Shunli, detained in connection with her advocacy on the Universal Periodic Review of China.

(Geneva) - The UN Human Rights Council should demand the release of detained Chinese human rights defender Cao Shunli when it meets in Geneva next week, the International Service for Human Rights said today. It should also press China to ensure that Cao receives access to specialist medical treatment following a critical deterioration in her health while in detention.

'It is imperative that the Human Rights Council President and States speak out on the detention and ill-treatment of Cao Shunli and hold China to account for its obligations under international law and as a member of the Council,' said Michael Ineichen, ISHR's Director of Human Rights Council Advocacy.

Cao Shunli was arrested at Beijing airport on 14 September 2013 and prevented from travelling to Geneva where she was to participate in an ISHR training program and undertake advocacy at the Human Rights Council. After being held incommunicado for more than five weeks she was charged with disrupting public order and detained in Beijing First Prison. The charges are understood to relate to her role in organising a series of peaceful demonstrations to demand greater participation in China's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) by the Human Rights Council, which was held in October 2013.

After being denied access to proper medical care in prison, Cao Shunli was transferred to a Beijing hospital last week. She has been denied access to a lawyer and remains in a critical condition.

'Cao's detention for organising a peaceful protest is a flagrant violation of her rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly,' Mr Ineichen said.

'The denial of access to a lawyer and proper medical care is also incompatible with China's obligations under customary international law to ensure a fair trial and under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to ensure Cao has access to adequate health care.'

The March session will be the first time the UN Human Rights Council has met since Cao was detained and is also the first session since China was elected as a member of the Council in November. Additionally, the Council is scheduled to adopt the report of October's Universal Periodic Review on China on 19 March. A number of States made recommendations during that review urging China to end attacks on human rights defenders and prevent and ensure accountability for reprisals, including Tunisia, Switzerland, Ireland and the Czech Republic.

'China has an obligation as a member of the Council to uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights and to fully cooperate with its mechanisms. Cao Shunli's detention in retaliation for her efforts to shine a light on China's human rights record at the Council is flagrantly incompatible with these obligations,' Mr Ineichen said.

'Reprisals against human rights defenders for their efforts to expose and seek accountability for human rights violations on the international stage amount to an attack not only on the defenders themselves, but also on the rule of law and the integrity of the UN itself,' Mr Ineichen said.

'In circumstances such as this, the Council, its President and other Member States have an obligation to act. It is incumbent on these actors to uphold the right of everyone to unhindered access to and communication with the United Nations, as guaranteed in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.'

ISHR calls on the President of the Human Rights Council, member and observer States, and the Council itself to unequivocally condemn the ill-treatment of Cao Shunli, push for full investigations into all cases of alleged reprisals, ensure perpetrators are held to account, and guarantee that human rights defenders are able to carry out their vital work in a [safe and enabling environment](#).

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For further information on the case of Cao Shunli, see the information provided by [Chinese Human Rights Defenders](#). Cao's case has also been the subject of a [joint statement](#) by a number of leading UN human rights experts.