

[UN Human Rights Council must demand accountability for death of Cao Shunli](#)

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(Update - 18 March 2014) - A group of independent UN human rights experts has issued a joint statement expressing deep regret at the death of Cao Shunli and calling on China to fully and promptly investigate the circumstances leading to Ms Cao's death.

'The death of Ms Cao is a tragic example of the results of criminalization of the activities of human defenders in China and reprisals against them. It is unacceptable that civil society activists pay the ultimate price for peaceful and legitimate interaction with the United Nations and its human rights mechanisms,' the experts said.

The experts also recalled that the Secretary-General, the High Commissioner for Human Rights and successive presidents of the Human Rights Council have highlighted the legitimate role of civil society in defending human rights enjoyment for all and the importance of prevention and adequate response to reprisals and intimidation.

The full statement of the UN human rights experts is [available here](#).

High-level statements deploring the death of Ms Cao and calling for an investigation have also been made by the [US](#), the [UK](#), the [European Union](#), and [Germany](#), among others.

(Geneva) - The International Service for Human Rights is deeply saddened by the death of Chinese human rights defender Cao Shunli earlier today.

Ms Cao was detained by Chinese authorities on 14 September 2013 and was transferred to hospital in a critical condition on 20 February 2014 after being denied access to proper medical care in prison. She had been detained in connection with her role in organising a series of peaceful demonstrations which demanded greater civil society participation in China's Universal Periodic Review by the Human Rights Council, which was held in October 2013.

'Cao Shunli was a courageous human rights lawyer and defender who was targeted by the Chinese authorities in retaliation for her work to expose corruption and promote human rights and basic democratic freedoms,' said Michael Ineichen, ISHR's Director of Human Rights Council Advocacy.

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

'Her death is a direct result of China's denial of her basic civil and political rights, together with a denial of access to adequate health care in violation of China's obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.'

Ms Cao's death is also a flagrant case of a reprisal against a human rights defender for their cooperation with the UN human rights system.

'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, ill-treatment and ultimately her death in retaliation for her efforts to shine a light on China's human rights record at the Council is manifestly incompatible with these obligations,' Mr Ineichen said.

In the strongest possible terms, ISHR calls on the Human Rights Council, its President and other Member States to unequivocally condemn the detention, ill-treatment and death of Cao Shunli, to support an independent investigation into her death, and to hold China accountable for this reprehensible reprisal against a committed and peaceful human rights defender.

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For further information on the case of Cao Shunli, see:

- <http://www.ishr.ch/news/human-rights-council-must-demand-release-detained-chinese-human-rights-defender>
- <http://www.ishr.ch/news/un-human-rights-experts-call-release-human-rights-defenders-china>