

[UN experts call for immediate release of human rights defenders in China](#)

17.10.2013



(Geneva) - A group of leading United Nations human rights experts has called for the immediate release of human rights defenders detained in connection with peaceful protests about civil society repression in China.

The call comes after the [International Service for Human Rights submitted a complaint to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) regarding the alleged arrest, detention and harassment of human rights defenders who were due to travel to Geneva to attend an ISHR training course and to advocate at the UN Human Rights Council regarding China's human rights record.

China is due to be reviewed by the Council through its Universal Periodic Review process on 22 October 2013.

In a [significant joint statement](#), the UN's independent experts on freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, human rights defenders and enforced disappearances said, 'These cases seem part of a pattern of increased harassment by China of those calling for greater accountability of public officials, transparency and political and legal reforms.'

'Intimidating civil society members who seek to contribute to such an important international dialogue is completely unacceptable. Ensuring the free participation of civil society actors, including human rights defenders, and other national stakeholders, in this process is crucial,' the experts said.

The experts expressed serious concern about the situation of Ms Cao Shunli and Ms Chen Jianfang who were intercepted at Beijing Capital International Airport on 14 September 2013. After initially being disappeared, it is understood that Cao Shunli is now being held at Beijing First Prison. It is reported that Chen Jianfang has been told by Chinese authorities that she is barred from travelling abroad for life.

'These reports suggest there have been acts of reprisals against people who seek to cooperate with the UN,' said UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders Margaret Sekaggya. 'Defenders play a key role in holding States to account for the implementation of their human rights obligations, including at the international level. Their legitimate work should be fully respected.'

UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association, Maina Kiai, said 'Impeding people who are demanding to participate in the UPR from peacefully demonstrating constitutes a breach of China's international obligations to respect the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, one of the core rights to be enjoyed in a democracy.'

'As made clear by the Human Rights Council in its latest resolution on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of peaceful protests, this obligation includes facilitating peaceful protests by providing

protestors with access to public space, and protecting them, where necessary, against any threats,' Mr Kiai said.

Commenting on the situation of Cao Shunli, the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances said that 'accurate information on the detention of any person, including the reasons and place of detention, shall be made promptly available to their family members and their counsel'.

'These serious allegations must be investigated thoroughly and impartially by the Chinese authorities,' the experts concluded.

For comment from the UN experts, please contact Guillaume Pfeiffle (Tel: [+41 22 917 9384](tel:+41229179384) / gpfeiffle@ohchr.org) or Marcelo Daher ([+41 22 917 9431](tel:+41229179431) / mdaher@ohchr.org).

For comment from ISHR, please contact Michael Ineichen ([+41 78 827 77 86](tel:+41788277786) / m.ineichen@ishr.ch).

ISHR