

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

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April 2, 2001

His Excellency Jiang Zemin
President, People's Republic of China
Zhongnanhai
Xichengqu (West City District)
Beijing City
People's Republic of China

Cc: Justice Minister
Minister of Foreign Affairs

Your Excellency,

We issue this joint statement to express our grave concern about the ongoing detention of three academics by Chinese authorities. These scholars have been held over the past few months without adequate explanation of the reasons for their detention or adequate opportunity for them to defend themselves. The mystery surrounding the conditions of these scholars' detention will likely deter other academics from freely pursuing their research in and about China for fear of suffering the same treatment. Such an occurrence would have grave negative impacts on China's future social and academic development.

We urge you to ensure that the internationally recognized human rights of these scholars are protected and that they are immediately released in the absence of clear evidence of criminal activity under internationally accepted standards:

- Dr. Xu Zerong, who holds a Ph.D. from Oxford University, was detained last fall, although to date the authorities have not presented any information regarding any charges against him. Dr. Xu's family has stated that they still do not know where he is being held, and he has not been allowed to speak with a lawyer, in contravention of China's judicial procedures. Dr. Xu was active in sociological research and publishing the Chinese Social Sciences Quarterly in Hong Kong before he returned to the mainland to assume positions as an associate research professor at Guangdong Provincial Academy of Social Sciences and an affiliated professor at Zhongshan University.
- Professor Li Shaomin, who teaches business at the City University of Hong Kong, was detained on February 25 while on his way to visit Shenzhen. At this writing, the authorities have not stated why he was arrested. Prof. Li, a U.S. citizen for the last six years, is a much-published sociologist whose work focuses on the issues involved in China's privatizing economy and on the impact and use of advertising in China. Prof. Li received his Ph.D. in sociology from Princeton University in 1988, and was a post-doctoral fellow at Harvard University's Fairbank Center for East Asian Research.



He also worked closely with several major western corporations interested in doing business in China. He frequently traveled between Hong Kong and mainland China, where he operates a commercial website in Shenzhen dedicated to internet advertising in China.

- Dr. Gao Zhan, a research scholar based at American University in Washington, D.C., was detained last month and was recently publicly accused by the Chinese Foreign Ministry of spying for unspecified “overseas intelligence agencies.” Although authorities have stated that she has confessed to these charges, to date the government has not offered any evidence to support this charge. Her husband, Xue Donghua, who was also detained without charge and later released, has strenuously denied the allegations. The couple’s five-year-old son, a U.S. citizen, was separated from his parents for 26 days without any notification to U.S. authorities, in contravention of clear international law. Dr. Gao’s academic work focuses on foreign students, especially women, who return to China after a period abroad.

China signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights on October 1998, thus committing itself to strive to provide all individuals the right to be free from “arbitrary arrest or detention,” and to guarantee all the “freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds.” The ongoing detention of these scientists violates these fundamental rights.

We respectfully urge your government to demonstrate its commitment to protecting and promoting academic freedom in China by either immediately releasing the detained scientists, or by promptly affording them the opportunity to defend themselves against formal charges in a court of law following international standards of due process.

Thank you for your consideration of these urgent and important matters. We look forward to your reply.

Dr. Yolanda Moses,
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Co-Chair, Human Rights Watch Academic Freedom Committee

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American Sociological Association

New York Academy of Sciences Committee on the Human Rights of Scientists