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## ALERTS & STATEMENTS

# The Chinese Government Must End Reprisals Against Activists Demanding Participation in UPR

on Jul 4, 2013

(Chinese Human Rights Defenders, July 3, 2013) – CHRDR has learned from activists in Beijing that, at around 9 a.m. on July 1, Beijing public security forces swept up and detained a large number of activists who had been taking part in a sit-in in front of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) office, as they sought a role in participating in the drafting of the country's national human rights report for China's **upcoming Universal Periodic Review**. The peaceful, two-week-long sit-in, conducted day and night and under Beijing's scorching heat and occasional thunderstorms, is a continuation of a five-year struggle by a group of Chinese citizens demanding participation in UPR. Most of the estimated 150 to 200 participants were women, including a number of elderly, who have grievances against corrupt officials or complaints about injustices they have suffered. These individuals have been petitioning the government for redress and accountability for years despite abuses and reprisals by authorities.

"By taking away the peaceful demonstrators, the Chinese government is showing its determination to keep handling UPR in a black box," said Renee Xia, international director of CHRDR. "The government is taking yet another step to undermine UPR, aiming to reduce it to a pointless exercise with no impact on improving human rights conditions in China," said Renee Xia.

Police had monitored the sit-in since it began on June 18 and until July 1, when hundreds of officers, with the assistance of MFA officials, cleared away the activists and cordoned off the area in front of the MFA office. Officers took away the activists in two groups, those from Beijing and those from outside the capital. Non-local demonstrators were driven off in four buses while a dozen or so Beijing residents were taken away in one vehicle and eventually interrogated at five police stations, including the Jinsong Police Station and Shuangjing Police Station. Those from Beijing were released on the evening of July 1 after approximately 12 hours of interrogation. But the fate of the larger group remains largely unknown. They were taken to Jiujiingzhuang, a temporary detention center, which is often used by police to incarcerate and sort out petitioners and others who authorities consider "undesirables" before they hand them over to local authorities.

The sit-in participants had been awaiting an official reply to an October 2012 request to contribute to China's human rights report, which should be submitted by July 22 to the UN Human Rights Council, according to the UPR timetable. Among the Beijing residents who was interrogated and later released is Cao Shunli (曹顺利), a central figure in the persistent push for citizen participation in UPR. "Police formed a human-wall surrounding us, no one was allowed to move. We were forced into vehicles.... I was questioned all day and released around 8 p.m.," Cao said. "We just want to have all the participants in the sit-in to have a dialogue with officials, to know how the country's human rights report is produced and who should be part of the process. We basically want to understand what opportunities and rights there are in the actualization and implementation of such a human rights report." MFA officials at one point had agreed to talk to activists, but only would allow several activists to be present at the talk, a condition that the sit-in participants rejected, citing that UPR information should be open to the public.

Another Beijing activist who was also released said, "We saw those (participants in the sit-in) from outside Beijing resisting order and being carried away, and we heard them screaming as if they were being beaten... Some escaped from Jiujiingzhuang, but we don't know what happened to those who did get away." The interrogation focused on questions such as why they gathered in front of MFA, and that they had been told it was unlawful to stage the sit-in. On July 3, Cao and several dozen activists returned to the MFA building, but they have had to gather across the street since the area in front of the building has been cordoned.

### Years of Harassment of Activists Demanding UPR Participation

Since 2008, authorities have intimidated and harassed activists who have pursued transparency and participation in the UPR process. Several of the leaders in the drive have been put under house arrest or detained since December 2008, when their first request to the government related to **China's UPR in 2009** was submitted (see CHRDR's **alert**). A trial opened on June 8, 2013, for Peng Lanlan (彭兰岚), a Hunan activist involved in this campaign. Peng was detained on grounds of "obstructing official business" in August 2012 and reportedly tortured by police.

Cao Shunli has been detained several times since 2008 for spearheading the campaign. For example, Cao and fellow activist Zhang Ming (张明) were seized by Beijing police in February 2009 after trying to submit an application at the State Council Information Office seeking to assist drafting the first "National Human Rights

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Action Plan.” At the time, CHRDN expressed alarm about this troubling incident, especially in light of the emphasis placed by China at the UN on “broad consultation” with the public in drafting the plan prior to China’s first UPR. CHRDN **reported** in April 2009 that, though China’s first plan claimed “broad participation by the relevant government departments and all social sectors,” the organizations involved in the drafting were all government-organized NGOs (GONGOS), and scholars who participated were from state-run research institutions handpicked by authorities.

On December 9, 2011—the eve of UN Human Rights Day—Cao and another activist, Hu Guang (胡光), were briefly taken into custody by police in Beijing after preparing to submit an application to help draft China’s “**Human Rights Action Plan for 2012-2015**.” And on August 13, 2012, Beijing police seized more than a dozen activists on their way to the State Council Information Office, where they hoped to submit an application for public disclosure about the Action Plan’s drafting process. At the time, State Council representatives simply cited “instructions from above” when refusing to accept the activists’ appeals.

The Chinese government has shrouded in secrecy information about its “National Human Rights Report” being prepared for the country’s **second UPR**. In a rare response after requests of information by hundreds of Chinese citizens in the past four years about the upcoming UPR, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) stated in an official document in November 2012 that such materials constituted “state secrets” and could not be disclosed. (See **MFA reply in Chinese and English**.) CHRDN has contended that the requested information by the activists in no way involves “state secrets.”

In fact, the participants in the push, which led to the recent sit-in, have mainly sought to contribute to the drafting and preparation of China’s human rights report, meet with Chinese officials to discuss government failures in addressing rights abuses and seeking redress, and submit information about rights conditions that could be considered for the report. They have also requested to learn more about the “working group” that was said to have put together China’s report for its 2009 UPR, as well as about government agencies involved in drafting the report for the coming UPR and NGOs that have supposedly been consulted. (See Chinese-language applications that activists have submitted to the MFA **here** on CHRDN’s website.)

#### CHRDN Recommendations

The Chinese government must stop harassing and persecuting activists for requesting to participate in UPR, and instead allow Chinese citizens to play an important and rightful role in the process.

The government should allow independent investigation of violations that have occurred against Chinese citizens who have sought to take part in and obtain information about China’s UPR.

The government should unconditionally release Peng Lanlan from detention and free all participants incarcerated for the sit-in.

CHRDN also asks the Human Rights Council to urge the Chinese government to respect the **principles and guidelines** of UPR pertaining to civil society participation and the open process of public consultation. CHRDN further requests the President of the UN Human Rights Council inquire about allegations of harassment and intimidation against Chinese citizens and Chinese authorities’ sealing off UPR-related information as “state secrets.”

*To learn more about China and UPR:*

#### CHRDN Asks UN Human Rights Council to Scrutinize Five Key Areas during China’s Universal Periodical Review

<http://chrdnet.com/2009/01/chrd-asks-un-human-rights-council-to-scrutinize-five-key-areas-during-chinas-universal-periodical-review/>

#### UN Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review of China: Summary, Analysis, and Suggestions for Follow-up

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#### The United Nations Universal Periodic Review on China’s Human Rights Geneva, February 9 and 11, 2009 What Questions to Ask, What Recommendations to Make

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#### China’s “Human Rights Action Plan”: Long Awaited, Short in Substance <http://chrdnet.com/2009/04/chinas-human-rights-action-plan-long-awaited-short-in-substance/>

#### Chinese Government, Having Failed to Honor its Previous Commitments, Has Disqualified Itself for UN Human Rights Council

<http://chrdnet.com/2009/05/chinese-government-having-failed-to-honor-its-previous-commitments-has-disqualified-itself-for-un-human-rights-council/>

CHRDN handbook to assist citizens’ participation in UPR: 《联合国2013年普遍定期审议民间参与手册》

<http://www.hr-cs.blogspot.com/2013/07/2013.html>

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