

Statement at 48th session of the UN Human Rights Council
Item 3: Interactive Dialogue with the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention
Speaker: Li Aijie

Madame President,

I am the wife of Zhang Haitao.¹ Six years ago, my husband was charged by Chinese authorities with ‘inciting subversion of State power’ and ‘illegally providing intelligence to overseas entities’ and sentenced to 19 years in prison, simply because he exercised his freedom of speech online.

He had been long engaged with civil society movements, calling for greater democratisation in China. His so-called ‘criminal acts’ involved sharing photos online of Chinese authorities ‘stability maintenance’ measures and revealing the government’s genocidal policies in Xinjiang. In 2015, he was detained by authorities, and in both pre-trial detention and prison suffered from torture and ill-treatment. His lawyer told us that he had been beaten, burned, and shackled; when I was finally able to visit, I learned he was not allowed in the open air, and was kept in solitary confinement.

From then until now, 1240 days have passed. The government has not allowed further visits by Zhang’s family or his lawyers; we have no information about his situation, nor even whether he is still alive.

The United Nations human rights experts have sent or joined 13 Communications to the Chinese government, raising concerns about China’s attempts to silence human rights defenders through arbitrary detention, including long prison sentences. As Zhang Haitao’s case demonstrates clearly, this is precisely China’s strategy.

My husband Zhang Haitao is innocent. I urge the UN Human Rights Council to do all it can to see that China respects its international human rights obligations, ensures the protection of the basic rights of my husband Zhang Haitao and all arbitrarily detained human rights defenders: the right to see their families and legal counsel, to communicate with the outside world, to breathe fresh air, to be treated humanely, and above all, his right to life.

Thank you.

¹ Pronunciation: JAHNG High-TAOH