

8 January 2021

China: Woman human rights defender He Fangmei disappeared for three months

Woman human rights defender **He Fangmei** (何方美) has been disappeared for three months after conducting a protest in front of a local government office in Huixian, Xinxiang, Henan province on 9 October 2020. He Fangmei's husband, Li Xin, has been uncontactable since he was taken away in Beijing by individuals believed to be Huixian local police five days after his wife's disappearance. He Fangmei is pregnant and a mother of two young children, one of whom is disabled and requires regular medical treatment.

[He Fangmei](#) (何方美) is a health rights defender who advocates for vaccine safety and for access to remedies for victims of defective vaccines. She began seeking accountability and compensation after her daughter was paralysed with a neurological disease after receiving defective vaccines in March 2018 when the child was ten months old. She then co-founded "Home for Vaccine Babies" (疫苗宝宝之家), an informal network of families whose young children became seriously ill or disabled as a result of receiving defective vaccines. She and her husband Li Xin travel to Beijing frequently to seek medical care for their daughter and to petition government offices in the capital to press for State and corporate accountability for the harms suffered by individuals who received defective vaccines and their families. In March 2019, she was arrested while fundraising on the streets of Beijing along with other families affected by defective vaccines. She was then taken back to Henan and detained until she was put on trial in November 2019 for "picking quarrels and provoking trouble". In January 2020, she was released after the local prosecutors withdrew the charges against her.

On 2 October 2020, He Fangmei went to the Huixian municipal government office and [splashed black ink](#) at the front entrance, to protest the government's failure to provide her remedies for her daughter's illness and compensation for her detention in 2019. She was also protesting against the close police surveillance and restrictions of movement against her and her family which obstructed their travel to Beijing, where her daughter seeks better quality medical care. The local public security office issued an order of 10-day administrative detention against her, but decided to suspend its enforcement because she is pregnant.

On 9 October 2020, He Fangmei went to the same government office and [splashed black paint](#) at the front entrance. She then became uncontactable some time between 9 and 10 October 2020. She is an active Twitter user and acquaintances took over the administration of her [account](#) after she went missing and began posting updates and concerns since 10 October about her apparent enforced disappearance.

In the subsequent weeks, acquaintances and families of victims of defective vaccines made multiple phone calls to the local public security office, but they either went unanswered or the person who answered said it was the wrong number. Information posted on her Twitter account several days after her disappearance and attributed to her husband Li Xin, who was in Beijing, suggests that He Fangmei may be under de facto house arrest in Huixian. Local officials were quoted as saying her two young children are being "taken care of." In the late afternoon of 14 October 2020, Li Xin also became uncontactable, according to those who attempted to reach him on his mobile. To date, there has been no confirmed information about He Fangmei and her immediate family's exact whereabouts and well-being.

On 26 October 2020, concerned individuals made [phone calls](#) to He Fangmei's family and were told that they had no information of her whereabouts after she went missing; the family have not

heard from Li Xin either since he was taken from Beijing back to Huixian; and they have not received any official notice from the police concerning He Fangmei or Li Xin.

In November 2020, families affected by defective vaccines went to local government offices in Huixian to inquire about He Fangmei's situation but were not able to obtain any information. Around the same time, these families launched a social media and letter writing campaign to press the relevant authorities to reveal He Fangmei's whereabouts. Some of these families have been [interrogated](#) by public security officers who warned them not to engage in the campaign.

Front Line Defenders is extremely concerned by the lack of information regarding the whereabouts and well-being, and the apparent enforced disappearance of He Fangmei, her husband, and her two young children, especially in light of her pregnancy and her daughter's medical conditions. It believes her and her family's disappearance and the harassment they faced prior to it are reprisals for He Fangmei's peaceful and legitimate work in promoting and defending human rights, including the right to health.

Front Line Defenders urges the relevant authorities in China to:

1. If they have He Fangmei, her husband, and their two children in custody, immediately and unconditionally release them, and take all necessary measures to ensure their physical and psychological well-being and integrity, including prompt and immediate access to adequate medical care;
2. Immediately reveal He Fangmei, her husband, and their two children's whereabouts and well-being, and launch an independent, impartial, and thorough investigation into the events between 9 October 2020 and to date to determine the nature of the human rights violations against them and to identify and hold perpetrators to account in accordance with international human rights standards;
3. Cease and refrain from all forms of harassment of He Fangmei, her family, and all other vaccine safety advocates;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in China are able to carry out their human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, in line with China's international human rights obligations and commitments.