

8 May 2020

China: Woman human rights defender Liu Yanli sentenced

On 2 May 2020, lawyers representing woman human rights defender **Liu Yanli (刘艳丽)** received the [official verdict](#) from the Dongbao District Court in Jingmen city, Hubei province. The verdict convicted and sentenced Liu Yanli to four years in prison for “picking quarrels and provoking trouble”. The verdict is dated 24 April 2020, however her trial took place on 31 January 2019.

Liu Yanli is an active blogger and has published numerous articles online and campaigned for issues such as anti-corruption, transparency for government officials’ personal assets, protection of the rights of elderly veteran soldiers, and democratic reforms. She is also a member of the free speech campaign group [Independent Chinese PEN Centre](#), part of PEN International. In 2015, she participated in a campaign for China’s peaceful democratic transition and also engaged in efforts to legally register the independent organisation China Human Rights Watch. Both campaigns were initiated by fellow human rights defender [Qin Yongmin](#), who is now serving 13 years’ imprisonment as consequence for his peaceful human rights work. Liu Yanli is also the recipient of the 14th [Lin Zhao Memorial Award](#) given by the Chinese PEN in 2018 and of the 2nd [Yu Zhijian Memorial Award](#) in 2019.

Liu Yanli has been subjected to police summonses, harassment and confiscation of her computers on numerous occasions in the past in reprisal for her blog posts and writings online, criticising state policies. On 26 September 2016, she was taken into custody and detained on suspicion of libel and was then formally arrested on 3 November 2016. On 27 May 2017, Liu Yanli was released on bail pending investigation, however on 25 May 2018 she was placed back in police custody under residential surveillance until her trial took place on 31 January 2019.

In the official verdict, the court cited 28 published articles or social media postings by Liu Yanli that contained “false information about major domestic events”, “insulted and attacked leaders of the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese State”, “maliciously sensationalised popular social events”, and “created disturbances that damaged public order”. In the [final statement](#) she prepared for the day of the trial, Liu Yanli insisted on her innocence and that opposition to and criticisms of the Communist Party are protected speech. She stressed that her writings represented her personal opinions on issues of public concern and she was peacefully exercising her right to freedom of expression, which is guaranteed under the Chinese Constitution.

Front Line Defenders condemns the sentencing of Liu Yanli and believes it is a direct reprisal against her legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights.

Front Line Defenders urges the relevant authorities in China to:

1. Reverse the verdict against Liu Yanli, immediately and unconditionally release her, and end all judicial actions against her;
2. Ensure that, pending Liu Yanli’s release, she is not subjected to any form of torture or other ill-treatment, in strict adherence to the conditions set out in the ‘Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment’, adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988. Ensure as well that she has

immediate, regular and unrestricted access to legal counsel of her choice, and is able to communicate with family members, without undue interference;

3. 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;
4. Initiate a comprehensive legal reform process, in consultation with independent civil society and human rights defenders, to review existing laws, regulations, policies and practices, especially the provisions related to public order offences, that have been used to target human rights defenders, with a view to align them with China's obligations under international human rights law and standards.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw attention to Article 6 (b and c): "Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others: (b) As provided for in human rights and other applicable international instruments, freely to publish, impart or disseminate to others views, information and knowledge on all human rights and fundamental freedoms; (c) To study, discuss, form and hold opinions on the observance, both in law and in practice, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and, through these and other appropriate means, to draw public attention to those matters", and to Article 12 (1 and 2): "(1) Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to participate in peaceful activities against violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms. (2) The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration."

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson

Executive Director