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China: Upcoming hearing on the revocation of human rights lawyer Ren Quanniu's license

On 19 January 2020, the Henan Provincial Judicial Department will hold a hearing in Zhengzhou, at the request of human rights lawyer **Ren Quanniu (任全牛)**, who will challenge the authorities' decision to initiate the process to revoke his lawyer's license in response to his human rights work.

[Ren Quanniu \(任全牛\)](#) is a human rights lawyer based in Zhengzhou, Henan province in central China. He has provided legal assistance to detained or prosecuted human rights defenders and journalists, including [Ding Lingjie](#), [Zhen Jianghua](#), and Zhang Zhan. He has also defended individuals who faced prosecution due to their religious affiliations, including Falun Gong followers. In 2016, he was placed under criminal detention for almost a month after he publicly called on the local police to investigate allegations that his client, woman human rights defender [Zhao Wei](#), was ill-treated in a detention centre.

In 2020, Ren Quanniu was hired to defend one of the [12 Hong Kong youth activists](#) who were intercepted by Chinese authorities in August 2020 while fleeing to Taiwan by boat, but the authorities refused to allow him to meet his client and repeatedly threatened him in a bid to force him to abandon the case. [Lu Siwei](#), another human rights lawyer who also represented one of the Hong Kong activists, is also facing revocation of his license and attended a hearing in Chengdu on 13 January to challenge the decision. On 28 December 2020, The European Union [criticised](#) the trial and subsequent sentencing of ten of the Hong Kong activists for not respecting the defendants' fair trial and due process rights, including the right to appoint legal counsel of their choice.

In early January 2021, Ren Quanniu received two [official notices](#), both dated 31 December 2020, from the Henan Provincial Judicial Department informing him that it opened an investigation on 21 December 2020 into his conduct. The Department indicated it has decided to initiate the process to revoke his license as an "administrative punishment" for his actions during a trial in November 2018 where he was legal counsel to an individual prosecuted for "using a cult to harm the implementation of laws", a trumped-up charge often used to target members of religious groups not approved by the government.

The notices said Ren Quanniu's actions violated article 39(3) of the [Measures on the Administration of Lawyers' Practice](#), which prohibits "gathering crowds to make a ruckus or charge the courtroom; insulting, defaming, threatening, or hitting judicial personnel or litigation participants; denying the State's characterisation of a designated cult organization; or other conduct that seriously disrupts courtroom order". The notices went on to state that his actions "severely damaged the image of the legal profession" and "caused negative social impact". The notices did not specify what Ren Quanniu's offending actions were in that trial.

In a [statement](#) responding to the Department's notices, Ren Quanniu stated that the provincial authorities never informed him that an investigation had been launched against him nor did they reveal which body triggered it in the first place. He insisted everything he said during the November 2018 trial was reasonable and lawful and the accusations made in the notices were entirely baseless.

The attempt to revoke Ren Quanniu's license is consistent with a long-standing and systemic pattern of intimidation, surveillance, imprisonment and [disbarment](#) of human rights lawyers, which has intensified following the ["709 Crackdown"](#) in 2015.

Front Line Defenders believes the judicial authorities' actions against Ren Quanniu are reprisals for his legitimate human rights work, including his work as a defense lawyer for vulnerable groups.

Front Line Defenders urges the relevant authorities in China to:

1. Refrain from revoking Ren Quanniu's license, and end all administrative and other forms of harassment against him;
2. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights lawyers and 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 as well as international human rights standards, such as the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers;
3. Initiate a comprehensive legal reform process, in genuine consultation with independent civil society and human rights defenders, to review existing laws, regulations, policies and practices, especially those provisions governing lawyers, 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.

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