



**DUBLIN**  
Front Line Defenders – Head Office  
Second Floor, Grattan House  
Temple Road, Blackrock  
Co. Dublin, A94 FA39, Ireland

info@frontlinedefenders.org  
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +353 1 212 3750  
fax +353 1 212 1001

**BRUSSELS**  
Front Line Defenders – EU Office  
Square Marie-Louise 72  
1000 Brussels  
Belgium

euoffice@frontlinedefenders.org  
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +32 2 230 9383  
fax +32 2 230 0028

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## China: Human rights lawyer Chang Weiping in secret detention, denied access to lawyers

Since 22 October 2020, human rights lawyer **Chang Weiping (常玮平)** has been held in an undisclosed location and denied access to lawyers, after police took him into custody in the city of Baoji in the northwestern province of Shaanxi. This comes only six days after he spoke publicly about torture he suffered at the hands of local police.

[Chang Weiping](#) is a human rights lawyer known for his public interest litigation in defence of the rights of people facing discrimination based on their health status, sex, gender identity and sexual orientation. He has provided legal counsel to human rights defenders, victims of defective vaccines, as well as women, LGBT persons, and persons living with HIV/AIDS and hepatitis B who face discrimination in the workplace.

On the evening of 22 October 2020, after Chang Weiping was taken into custody, the Baoji police telephoned his wife, who lives in Guangdong province in southern China, and informed her that the defender had been placed under “residential surveillance at a designated location” (RSDL) for unspecified “violations of legal regulations”. The police did not inform her of the exact charges he faces, the location in which he is being held nor did they provide the family with an official RSDL notice.

On 26 October 2020, accompanied by two lawyers, Chang Weiping’s father went to the Gaoxin District Branch of the Baoji Public Security Bureau to seek additional information, request a meeting with Chang Weiping, present paperwork for legal representation, and submit an application for bail. The police did not allow the lawyers to meet Chang Weiping and refused to disclose the identity of the police officers or unit responsible for investigating him, the exact location of his detention, and the basis for placing him under RSDL. They justified these actions on the grounds that the human rights defender is suspected of “inciting subversion of national security” and that his case involves “state secrets”.

Chang Weiping’s detention came six days after he published online a [video clip](#), in which he shared details of his torture during a ten-day RSDL detention in a hotel room in Baoji in January 2020. He was placed under RSDL then in connection with his participation in a private gathering of lawyers, academics and activists in Xiamen city, Fujian province in early December 2019. Police launched a [cross-provincial operation](#) to detain, question and harass a number of [human rights defenders](#) who attended or were otherwise connected to the meeting. During his January 2020 RSDL, local authorities officially announced the suspension of Chang Weiping’s lawyer’s license.

In the video clip, Chang Weiping said that police interrogators tied him to a restraining device known as a “tiger chair” for “24 hours a day for ten days” and interrogated him 16 times during that period. In the ten months since his provisional release from RSDL, he said the local police kept him under strict surveillance at his family home in Fengxiang county in Baoji, telephoned him daily, and visited him at least once a week. He explained in the video clip that his work as a lawyer and his attendance at the December 2019 meeting in Xiamen were completely lawful examples of his exercise and defence human rights.

In August 2018, UN human rights experts [wrote](#) to the Chinese Government raising concern that the conditions of detention under RSDL “are analogous to incommunicado and secret detention

and tantamount to enforced disappearance”, exposing “those subjected to RSDL to the risk of torture and other inhuman and degrading treatment and other human rights violations.” The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has repeatedly warned China that “widespread or systematic imprisonment or other severe deprivation of liberty in violation of the rules of international law may constitute crimes against humanity.”

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the detention of Chang Weiping in an undisclosed location, without access to legal counsel which significantly raises the risks of torture and ill-treatment in detention. Front Line Defenders believes that his detention is solely motivated by his peaceful and legitimate work in the defence of human rights.

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in China to:**

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Chang Weiping and end all forms of harassment against him;
2. Ensure that, pending his release, Chang Weiping 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;
3. Ensure that, pending his release, his place of detention is revealed and he has immediate, regular and unrestricted access to and able to communicate with his family and family-appointed lawyers without undue interference, and that his family and lawyers receive in a timely manner the official RSDL detention notice in writing and the details behind any charges against him;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in China are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment;
5. Initiate a comprehensive legal reform process, in genuine consultation with independent civil society, to review existing laws, regulations, policies and practices, especially the procedures of residential surveillance in a designated location, 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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