

17 April 2020

China: Three Fuzhou human rights defenders sentenced

On 17 April 2020, the Cangshan District Court in Fuzhou city, Fujian province found human rights defenders **Lin Lanying** (林兰英), **Lin Yingqiang** (林应强), and **Tang Zhaoxing** (唐兆星) guilty of “picking quarrel and provoking trouble”. Lin Yingqiang and Tang Zhaoxing were both sentenced to three years in prison whilst Lin Lanying was sentenced to one year and ten months. **He Zongwang** (何宗旺), a human rights defender who was detained along with the three in September 2018, was tried separately and sentenced in August 2019.

[Lin Lanying](#) is a long time petitioner and woman human rights defender in Fuzhou, focusing primarily on actions to support prosecuted or imprisoned human rights defenders. [Lin Yingqiang](#) is a petitioner and land rights defender in Fuzhou. Since 2004, he has initiated and participated in advocacy and public protests to support local farmers who have had their land appropriated by the authorities without adequate compensation. [Tan Zhaoxing](#) is a petitioner and human rights defender in Fuzhou and has participated in advocacy and public actions to support and raise awareness about the persecution of local political activists and human rights defenders. [He Zongwang](#) is a petitioner and human rights defender in Fuqing city, Fujian province. He participated in advocacy and public protests, including those aimed at raising awareness of social injustice and persecution of human rights defenders. Both Lin Yingqiang and He Zongwang have been previously detained for their works as human rights defenders.

On the morning of 12 September 2018, a group of more than 30 local human rights defenders gathered in front of the Fuzhou No. 1 Detention Centre to welcome the release of imprisoned human rights defender Yan Xingsheng (严兴声). They gave flowers to him, took group photos, and set off firecrackers which is a traditional practice aimed at warding off negative energy and often used for the occasion of prison release. As the group of defenders began to disperse, they were corralled and detained by police officers waiting nearby. Over the course of a month, most of the detained human rights defenders were released, except for Lin Lanying, Lin Yingqian, Tang Zhaoxing and He Zongwang.

Lin Lanying, Lin Yingqiang and Tang Zhaoxing were initially criminally detained on the charge of “gathering a crowd to disrupt public order” and later formally arrested on the charge of “picking quarrel and provoking trouble”, a vague public order offence often used to prosecute human rights defenders and peaceful protesters in recent years. They were tried on 22 November 2019. He Zongwang was prosecuted separately and tried by a different court in Fuzhou for “picking quarrel and provoking trouble” and “fabricating and intentionally disseminating false information”. He was sentenced on 30 August 2019 to four years in prison.

In the official verdict issued on 17 April 2020, the Cangshan Court wrote that the three defenders, joined by other petitioners, had engaged in seven public assemblies in 2018 in front of courts, detention centres, and convention centres while international conferences were being held. During the trial in November 2019, the lawyers defending the three defenders argued that the prosecutor’s assertion that these actions had “stirred up disturbances” and “seriously disturbed public order” was not backed up by the “evidence” they presented, including video footage of some of the protests in question. The defence lawyers argued that the prosecution of their clients was a reprisal against their peaceful activism.

Front Line Defenders condemns the court verdicts given on 30 August 2019 and 17 April 2020, and the sentencing of Lin Lanying, Lin Yingqiang, Tang Zhaoxing and He Zongwang to prison, as it believes that they are a direct reprisal against their legitimate human rights work, and the exercise of their freedom of assembly and of expression, which are guaranteed by the Chinese Constitution.

Front Line Defenders urges the relevant authorities in China to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Lin Lanying, Lin Yingqiang, Tang Zhaoxing and He Zongwang and quash their convictions as Front Line Defenders believes that they have been targeted solely as a result of their legitimate human rights work;
2. Ensure that, pending their release, they are 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. 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 genuine 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 abused to target human rights defenders, with a view to align them with China's obligations under international human rights law and standards.