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Human Rights Now

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Human Rights Now expresses deep concern about the series of detentions of human rights lawyers in China, and calls for their prompt release.

1. Human Rights Now (HRN), a Tokyo-based international human rights NGO, expresses its deep concern that more than 100 Chinese human rights lawyers have been questioned or detained by the authorities on or after July 9, 2015.
2. According to various media reports, since July 9, 2015, more than 100 human rights lawyers have been questioned or detained by the authorities across China. According to a website that supports Chinese human rights lawyers, the total number of those who have been questioned or detained is 139, as of 9PM (JST) of July 14, 2015. That figure includes human rights lawyers, law firm staffers, and their family members¹. 113 persons have been released, but more than twenty persons are either still in detention or have not been able to be contacted, including Ms. Wang Yu (who is called the bravest female lawyer in China), Ms. Wang's family, and Mr. Zhou Shifeng, who is the representative lawyer of Fengrui Law Firm, where Ms. Wang works as an attorney².

¹ <http://www.chrlawyers.hk/en/content/> 【截至 2015 年 7 月 13 日 21 点, 共计 139 名律师律所人员维权人士被刑拘带走失联约谈传唤短期限制人身自由】

² Brief profiles of Ms. Wang Yu and Mr. Zhou Shifeng may be seen at the following website (in Chinese or in English):

<http://www.chrlawyers.hk/en/content/china-human-rights-lawyers-concern-group-calls-urgent-attention-disappearance-rights-lawyer>

3. The Chinese government has not made an official announcement regarding the series of questionings and detentions. However, the media, including the People's Daily, Xinhua News Agency and China Central Television, have reported that the authorities are cracking down on the Beijing Fengrui Law Firm as a "major criminal organization that caused disturbances and disrupted social order," while also placing Mr. Zhou and Ms. Wang under criminal detention as suspects. The People's Daily as of July 12 listed the following, *inter alia*, as specific examples of "intentionally plotting to stir up disturbances involving sensitive cases": encouraging protest activities via the Internet, providing information regarding sensitive cases, appealing for contributions, and organizing activities systematically involving the general public and famous bloggers.³ The People's Daily and other reports listed about ten persons as suspects, but many other lawyers were taken in for questioning at the same time and remain missing.

4. The questioning and detaining of human rights lawyers on the grounds that their exercise of free speech on various sources including the Internet caused "disturbances and disrupted social order" violates international human rights protections such as the guarantee of freedom of speech recognized by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights frameworks. The crackdown on human rights lawyers contradicts Article 35 of the Chinese Constitution, which states that "citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of procession, and of demonstration." Moreover, the detention of lawyers who raised questions about cases that attracted public attention suppresses healthy debate in civil society and is extremely regrettable.

5. Activities by independent lawyers are indispensable for rule of law. In this regard, the "Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers" adopted by the Eighth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders in 1990⁴ stipulates the following provision regarding lawyers' activities:

³ <http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2015/0712/c1001-27290030.html>

⁴ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/RoleOfLawyers.aspx> As to the Japanese translation of the Basic Principles, please refer to the following website: <http://2010ken.la.coocan.jp/jp/f/f9.html>

Lawyers like other citizens are entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association and assembly. In particular, they shall have the right to take part in public discussion of matters concerning the law, the administration of justice and the promotion and protection of human rights and to join or form local, national or international organizations and attend their meetings, without suffering professional restrictions by reason of their lawful action or their membership in a lawful organization (Article 23).

If human rights lawyers are being detained for their exercise of free speech on various sources including the Internet, or involving the general public in citizen activities, the conduct of the Chinese government has clearly violated the basic principles listed above.

6. HRN expresses deep concern about the questioning and detention of human rights lawyers in China, and calls on the Chinese Government to:
 1. Immediately release all the human rights lawyers who are currently being detained.
 2. Disclose the locations and reasons for detention of all persons currently being detained, and guarantee their rights as established under international human rights laws, such as the right to interview with an attorney and their right to be treated in a humane manner.