

PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

China: Release prominent women's rights defenders

Paris-Geneva, March 19, 2015 – The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders called on the Chinese authorities today to *immediately and unconditionally* release *five women's rights defenders detained ahead of International Women's Day, as their detention seems only aimed at sanctioning their legitimate and peaceful human rights activities. In the interim, their right to a fair trial should be fully respected.*

On March 6-7, 2015, nine prominent women's rights and gender equality defenders were arbitrarily detained (for more information, see The Observatory's Urgent Appeal of March 13). Five of these defenders, namely Ms. **Li Tingting**, also known as "Li Maizi", Manager of the LGBT program at the Beijing Yirenping Center; Ms. **Wu Rongrong**, Founder and Executive Director of the Weizhiming Women's Center in Hangzhou; Ms. **Zheng Churan**, also known as "Datu," staff member of Yirenping based in Guangzhou; Ms. **Wei Tingting**, Director of LGBT rights organization Ji'ande in Beijing; and Ms. **Wang Man**, Beijing-based coordinator for the Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP), remain in detention in Beijing but have not yet been formally charged with any crimes.

During the first six days of their detention, all five defenders were denied access to their lawyers. Since then, four of the defenders have been allowed contact with their lawyers: Li Tingting on March 12, Wu Rongrong on March 16, Zheng Churan on March 17, and Wei Tingting on March 18. Wang Man has apparently still been denied access to her lawyer.

After their meeting on March 16, Ms. Wu Rongrong's lawyer reported that her medical condition is not suitable for continued detention and that she did not receive proper medical care in prison, including having her medication confiscated. Ms. Wu Rongrong, who suffers from diabetes and severe digestion issues, was demanded by the police to sleep on the floor. Likewise, Ms. Wei Tingting and Ms. Zheng Churan, who are both severely near-sighted, have not been allowed access to their glasses.

"All five women's rights defenders must be released immediately, or at a minimum be presented with formal charges if they are to be detained," said Karim Lahidji, FIDH President. "If they are charged, they should benefit from decent conditions of detention and from unhindered access to their lawyers."

Rallies have been organised worldwide in support of the five detainees. On March 18, 2015 marches took place in New Delhi, India, in Seoul, South Korea in front of the Chinese Embassy, and in New York City, USA, in front of the UN headquarters where the 59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is taking place. The main focus of the CSW is "the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, including current challenges that affect its implementation and the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women." Several NGOs have also called for a rally in support of the five detained defenders on March 21 in Hong Kong.

"The Observatory has recorded a high number of attacks against women's rights defenders ahead of the celebration of Women's Day. Discriminatory practices against women's rights defenders cannot be tolerated", said Gerald Staberock, OMCT Secretary General.

In addition, representatives of the European Union and the United States have publicly called for the release of the five activists.

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (OBS) was created in 1997 by FIDH and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT). The objective of this

programme is to intervene to prevent or remedy situations of repression against human rights defenders.

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