

Mr Li Keqiang
Prime Minister of the People's Republic of China
Guojia Zongli, The State Council General Office
Fuyoujie, Xichengqu
Beijingshi 100017
People's Republic of China

Brussels, the 28th of May 2013

Re: Concerns regarding eleven human rights lawyers taken into police custody and interrogated while visiting the Ziyang Legal Education Centre in Chengdu

Your Excellency,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE), which, through the national Bars and Law Societies of the Member States of the European Union and the European Economic Area, represents more than 1 million European lawyers. In addition to membership from EU bars, it also has observer representatives from a further twelve European countries' bars.

The CCBE, through its Human Rights Committee, places great emphasis on respect for human rights and the rule of law. The CCBE is particularly concerned by the situation of human rights defenders in the world.

The CCBE writes to express its serious concern over the situation of eleven human rights lawyers who were taken to the Ziyang police station and interrogated on 13 May 2013 in Chengdu, Sichuan province.

According to the information that we received, Tang Jitian, Jiang Tianyong, Tang Tianhao, Liang Xiaojun, Lin Qilei, Zhang Keke, and Guo Haiyue were standing outside the Ziyang Legal Education Centre when they were violently attacked and contact with them was lost. Subsequently, the police also took into custody Li Heping, Wang Chen, Yang Huiwen and Wen Haibo--fellow lawyers who had come to help their colleagues.

The Ziyang Public Security Bureau released the lawyers, one after the other, during the night of 14 May after interrogating them for "obstruction of official business" and "releasing false information". One of the lawyers, Tang Tianhao, was reported to have sustained serious injuries.

The CCBE is alarmed by these facts, which indicate a repressive environment for human rights lawyers in China.

In this context, the CCBE wishes to draw to your attention the following Articles of the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers (1990):

Article 16 states that:

Governments shall ensure that lawyers (a) are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference; (b) are able to travel and to consult with their clients freely both within their own country and abroad; and (c) shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economics or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics.

Furthermore, Article 23 states that:

Lawyers like other citizens are entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association and assembly. In particular, they shall have the rights 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 organisations and attend their meetings, without suffering professional restrictions by reason of their lawful action or their membership in a lawful organisation. In exercising these rights, lawyers shall always conduct themselves in accordance with the law and the recognised standards and ethics of the legal profession.

In view of the above, the CCBE respectfully urges you to take all necessary measures to guarantee that lawyers in China are able to perform their professional duties without hindrance, intimidation or harassment, including from members of law enforcement agencies, in order to preserve independence and integrity in the administration of justice.

Yours sincerely,

EVANGELOS TSOUROULIS

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'E. Tsouroulis', written in a cursive style.

CCBE President