

Mr Li Keqiang
Premier of the State Council of the
People's Republic of China
The State Council General Office
2, Fuyoujie, Xichengqu
Beijingshi 100017
People's Republic of China

Brussels, 30 July 2015

Re: Concerns regarding the arrest and/or disappearance of a large group of lawyers in China

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 thirteen European countries' bars.

The CCBE 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 deepest concerns over the recent arrest and disappearance of more than 200 hundreds lawyers, law firm staff, and human rights defenders.

We previously wrote to you on 9 July 2015 regarding the situation of 5 lawyers, You Feizhu and Ma Wei, Tang Tianhao, Ma Lianshun and Ge Yongxi, who had been arrested and detained on 29 May 2015. Furthermore, on 21 July 2015 the CCBE co-signed a letter, along with other organisations, strongly condemning the recent detention of a large number of human rights lawyers and activists in China.

According to the latest information available, a total of at least 255 lawyers, law firm staff, and human rights defenders have been detained, arrested, held incommunicado, summoned, or otherwise had their freedom temporarily restricted. Many of the detained have been subject to harassment due to their peaceful human rights activities and advocacy campaigns, while also being portrayed as criminals by official media. Among the arrested are also over 100 lawyers and rights activists who signed a public statement on 9 July 2015 condemning the disappearance of lawyer Wang Yu.

We understand that most of them have been released but that several human rights lawyers and activists (around 20) remain in custody or missing.

The CCBE is seriously alarmed by these arrests, which show a repressive environment for lawyers who uphold the rule of law.

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

Principle 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, Principle 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 urges you to immediately release all lawyers, law firm staff and human rights defenders who have been arbitrarily deprived of their liberty. We also implore you to confirm the whereabouts of those in detention and ensure that they have prompt and regular access to their lawyers and family. The CCBE further urges you to take immediate and effective steps to ensure that lawyers are free to exercise their freedoms of peaceful assembly and expression and that the rule of law is respected in China.

I look forward to hearing from you urgently.

Yours sincerely,



Maria ŚLAZAK
President