

## [China | Open letter from global civil society calls for release of student activists and workers](#)

18.12.2018

**In the last six months, upwards of a hundred individuals have been harassed, detained or disappeared for supporting workers to exercise their basic rights, and calling on the Chinese government to enforce their own laws. Twenty-nine remain in custody as of today. A solidarity letter signed by ISHR and more than a dozen civil society groups around the globe calls for their release, and an end to the crackdown on rights defence in China.**



At its Universal Periodic Review in November 2018, [the Chinese government presented its national report](#), in which asserted that 'citizens' rights to subsistence and development, as well as their personal rights, property rights, basic political rights and freedoms, labour rights, education rights, social security rights and other rights have been effectively protected and guaranteed through legislation.' Just days later, however, a widespread move to silence criticism and suppress student solidarity activism resulted in a wave of detentions.

'The contrast between what the Chinese government says, and what it does, has rarely been clearer,' says Sarah M Brooks, Asia advocate at ISHR.

The letter describes the way in which the efforts of one group of workers to represent their interests and exercise their rights under Chinese law were criminalised, leading to a nation-wide mobilisation of students and labour rights advocates. It calls on the Chinese government to release anyone detained without charge, including in ['residential surveillance in a designated location'](#), and to ensure those charged have access to their lawyers, protection from ill-treatment, and guarantees of a prompt and fair trial.

'We signed this letter in the hopes that global solidarity for the Jasic workers, and students who were supporting them, can encourage the Chinese government to reflect on the kind of development it advances, at home and abroad', says Brooks.

'Repressive measures to silence workers exacerbate workers' vulnerability, and run directly counter to the government's commitments to sustainable development'.

The full text of the letter is below; a [PDF version, including list of those detained](#), is available here.

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*Photo via China Labour Bulletin.*

### **Open letter from global civil society: China must release student activists and workers**

On 9 and 11 November, only days after China underwent a UN review on its human rights situation, Chinese authorities carried out a massive crackdown, forcibly disappearing student activists in five cities across the country. The missing activists are supporters of workers at Jasic Technologies, in Shenzhen, who have been fighting for their rights. This is the most severe case of repression against workers and students in China in recent years.

Today, marking the end of 37-day pre-charge detention period according to Chinese law, the undersigned groups call on China to release these students, activists and workers.

The Jasic workers' struggle started in May 2018, when a group of workers attempted to form a trade union according to the law; yet, in the months that followed, both the employer and local government denied workers' constitutional rights to freedom of association. Finally, police physically assaulted and arrested the workers in

late July. Soon after the arrest of the Jasic workers, university students and worker supporters around the country formed a support group to back the workers, staging demonstrations to draw attention from the general public and calling for the release of the workers.

On 24 August, riot police with full gear and shields raided an apartment in Huizhou, Guangdong Province, where members of the support group were staying. They took away over 50 students and worker activists. On the same day, at least three activists from the support group were arrested in Beijing. International labour organisations raised the alarm, and some media outlets covered these cases.

However, the crackdown has accelerated in recent weeks. On 9 and 11 November, the police carried out another mass arrest of members of the Jasic support group and labour activists: this included the forcible disappearance of 18 young activists and workers in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and Wuhan. A recent graduate of Peking University and a member of the Jasic support group, was even physically assaulted on the school's campus; instead of protecting him, the University's response was to excuse the act of the police.

Thus far, the four workers taken into police custody in July, and one labour NGO worker arrested in August, have been charged with 'gathering a crowd to disturb social order'; their lawyers have been denied access to their clients since at least October. Four activists have been charged with 'picking quarrels and provoking troubles'. They are currently being held in 'residential surveillance in a designated location', with no access to lawyer; are in 'residential surveillance in a designated location', which UN experts consider may constitute a form of forcible disappearance; or have been simply disappeared. The eighteen activists and workers taken in early November are still missing, with no official notification to lawyers or family members.

We are gravely concerned not only about the blatant violation of freedoms of association, assembly and expression and the targeting of activists and workers, but also about the personal safety and wellbeing of these individuals. As seen in the many cases of the rights lawyers and human rights defenders previously detained, especially since the '709 crackdown' in July 2015, victims of incommunicado and arbitrary detention are at serious risk of torture.

We call on the Chinese authorities to:

- immediately and unconditionally release all workers and human rights activists who are detained or disappeared;
- ensure that anyone in state custody is free from any torture or cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment, and has regular access to his family and to a lawyer of his or her choice; and
- end the use of physical assault, threats, and forcible disappearance to punish and deter anyone who seek to undertake work to promote human rights.

In solidarity,

*\*as of 11am GMT, 18 December, list will be updated regularly*

Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia - AHRE

Center for Civil Liberties (Ukraine)

CIVICUS (South Africa)

Espacio Público (Venezuela)

Frontline Defenders (Ireland)

Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions

Human Rights Defenders Network (Sierra Leone)

Human Rights in China (U.S./Hong Kong)

International Campaign for Tibet (global)

International Service for Human Rights (Switzerland)

International Tibet Network Secretariat (global)

Lawyers Rights Watch Canada

Public Foundation Adil soz (Kazakhstan)

Réseau Ouest Africain des Défenseurs des Droits Humains – ROADDH (Togo)

World Movement for Democracy (United States)

ISHR