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CHINA CSW: Growing pressure on Chinese dissidents including house arrest

Christian Solidarity Worldwide is highlighting the growing pressure on Chinese dissidents as the wife of Chen Guangcheng, the blind human rights lawyer under house arrest in Shandong, called for help from the international community this week.

Yuan Weijing sent a message on 24 November from the couple's home, where the family has been guarded by 12 policemen, thought to be from Shandong Police, day and night since Chen's release from prison on 9 September. Yuan explained that Chen is suffering from very poor health but despite repeated requests, authorities have refused to allow him access to medical treatment. Their five-year-old daughter is prevented from going to school and the family is reliant on Chen's mother, who is in her 70s, to shop for groceries. Chen's wife reported that the home has been stormed by police on several occasions without prior warning and threats have been made against Chen's life. Their village is guarded at each entrance by a total of 100 men, some of whom are believed to be policemen.

Chen, a self-taught lawyer who was blinded during childhood, has been under attack by Chinese authorities since 2005 when he began to expose human rights abuses related to China's one-child policy. He was sentenced to four years and three months imprisonment for "intentionally damaging property" and "gathering crowds to disturb transport order". Mobile phone jamming equipment has been installed to prevent the family communicating with the outside world for most of the time.

Chen, who is known as the "barefoot lawyer", has been an outspoken proponent of human rights through his legal work. Lawyers who worked to defend him during his trial in 2005 and 2006 were regularly beaten and intimidated.

The request for help comes at a time when dissidents are under increased attack. Liu Xia, wife of the Nobel Peace Prize Winner Liu Xiaobo, has been under house arrest in her Beijing apartment since the announcement that her husband was to be given the award.

Dr. Fan Yafeng, leader of the Chinese Christian Human Rights Lawyers Association, whose members are renowned for taking on human rights and religious freedom cases, is also under house arrest and subject to constant police harassment in Beijing since being warned not to speak to foreign journalists on 12 October. In the latest incident on 24 November, police detained Dr Fan, his wife and their 3-year-old son until 1.30am. The academic and house church leader has been banned from contacting foreigners and holding Christian meetings in his home.

CSW's Advocacy Director, Andrew Johnston said, "At a time when China's influence on the world stage is increasing, the international community must not forget the reality of life for those Chinese who dare to speak out against injustice. CSW calls upon the Chinese government to release Chen Guangcheng, Liu Xia and Dr Fan Yafeng, individuals whose detention has no legal basis in international law."