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CHINA Lawyer Ni Yulan awarded Tulip Prize for human rights defenders

Chinese legal activist, Ni Yulan, has been announced as the winner of the 2011 Dutch Government's Human Rights Defenders Tulip Prize. She was nominated by Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) and China Aid.

Ni Yulan's work as a housing rights activist, defending Beijing residents whose homes were demolished to make way for the 2008 Olympics, resulted in her being imprisoned on several occasions. Lawyer Ni is in a wheelchair due to beatings received in prison, which left her unable to walk and in poor health. She is currently on trial in Beijing with her husband Dong Jiqin for "creating a disturbance", and is giving evidence from bed whilst on oxygen.

The Dutch Government's Tulip Prize is awarded to an individual who has done "exceptional human rights work" in recognition of their commitment to the work and the personal cost to themselves. The award "consists of a statue and 100,000 Euros in funding for a project". Previous winners were Justine Masika Bihamba (Congo, 2008), Shadi Sadr (Iran, 2009) and Bertha Oliva de Natívi (Honduras, 2010). Ni Yulan is the first human rights defender from Asia to be given the award.

Chinese human rights lawyers continue to work in a hostile environment. Last month Christian lawyer Gao Zhisheng, who had been missing since April 2010, was reported in the Chinese press to have been sentenced to three years' imprisonment for violating terms of his probation (referring to a 2006 sentence). He is reportedly serving his sentence in a prison in Xinjiang province, far-west China. Chen Guangcheng, the blind human rights activist who campaigned against the one-child policy remains under strict house arrest in Shandong province.

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "CSW would like to congratulate Ni Yulan on being awarded the prestigious Tulip Prize. Lawyer Ni has suffered immensely at the hands of the Chinese for defending basic human rights. We hope that the award will send a message of encouragement to all human rights defenders in China, whose work often carries a high level of personal risk."