



3.28.14

CHINA | Human Rights Lawyers Detained Under Cult Charges

Three Chinese human rights lawyers and an unknown number of other citizens remain in detention after being taken away by police on March 21 while visiting a “black jail” in Jiansanjiang, Heilongjiang Province.

At least one of the lawyers, Tang Jitian, has been given a 15-day administrative sentence for “using a cult to disrupt social order”. It is not clear what charges have been brought against the other detainees.

According to a statement released by the Chinese Human Rights Lawyers Group, Jiang Tianyong, Tang Jitian, Wang Cheng and Zhang Junjie, along with “many other citizens”, were taken away by local police on March 21, the day after they had visited a “legal education center” at Qinglongshan Farm site in Jiansanjiang. The four lawyers were in the process of filing a lawsuit with the local authorities on behalf of the relatives of detainees held at the center. Lawyer Zhang Junjie was released.

Lawyers Tang Jitian and Jiang Tianyong both specialized in cases concerning religious freedom violations. Jiang Tianyong, a Christian, has represented Buddhists and Falun Gong practitioners. Tang Jitian has also advocated for the rights of religious groups. According to China Aid, members of religious communities, including unregistered church Christians, have also been held at the “black jail” or “legal education center” which the lawyers were visiting.

Lawyers and activists from other parts of China have gathered in protest in Jiansanjiang; at least four are on hunger strike. They have condemned the detention of Jiang, Tang, Wang and Zhang, and the other citizens and are calling for their immediate release, a full investigation into the incident in accordance with the law, and the investigation and outlawing of “black jails”.

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said, “We join Chinese human rights lawyers and other citizens in condemning the detention of Jiang Tianyong, Tang Jitian, Wang Cheng, Zhang Junjie and the relatives of those detained at Qinglongshan. This case demonstrates the dangerous and arbitrary use of “cult” related charges to detain human rights defenders, as well as members of religious communities. We applaud these lawyers’ courage in pursuing justice for the victims of unlawful detention, including religious minorities. We further call for the immediate release of those lawyers and citizens still in detention, and strongly urge the Chinese authorities to launch a full and impartial investigation into this case.”