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CHINA | Over 20 Protestors Beaten, Detained

More than half of the 40-plus supporters who have gathered in Heilongjiang Province in Northeast China to protest the detention of three human rights lawyers have been beaten or detained.

Lawyers Jiang Tianyong, Tang Jitian, Wang Cheng and Zhang Junjie, along with “many other citizens”, were taken by local police on March 21. Prior to their arrest, the four lawyers had visited a “legal education center”, believed to be a black jail, at Qinglongshan Farm site in Jiansanjiang, and were in the process of filing a lawsuit on behalf of the relatives of detainees believed to be illegally detained at the center. Lawyer Zhang Junjie was released.

As news of the incident spread, more than 40 human rights lawyers, activists and relatives of detainees travelled to Heilongjiang in support of the lawyers. Two of the supporting lawyers went on hunger strike. Lawyers and citizens have also issued an open letter to the Ministry of Public Security concerning the case, and the Chinese Human Rights Lawyers Group has produced a statement calling for the lawyers’ release, a full investigation into the incident in accordance with the law, and the investigation and outlawing of black jails.

According to reports from human rights organizations, as many as 24 of these supporters may have been assaulted or detained for peacefully calling for the release of the lawyers and other citizens detained there. Lawyers representing the detained lawyers and citizens are under surveillance and have been questioned about their involvement in the case.

Released lawyer, Zhang Junjie, made public a report of his detention, in which he alleges he was beaten by his interrogators and deprived of adequate food. According to Chinese social media reports, the remaining detainees have been subject to physical abuse and “indecent and obscene insults” directed toward women in the group.

At least two of the three lawyers have been put under 15-day administrative detention. Their expected date of release is April 6.

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said, “CSW strongly condemns the assault and detention of lawyers, activists and other citizens peacefully appealing for the release of Jiang Tianyong, Tang Jitian, Wang Cheng and others detained in connection with this case. We reiterate our 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, and allegations of ill-treatment in detention.”