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CHINA | Christian Activist Formally Arrested

Chinese church leader and activist Hu Shigen was formally arrested Jan. 8 after nearly six months in detention. Hu is among 11 individuals detained since July 2015 who have been formally arrested this month.

Hu, 60, was detained July 10 during a spate of detentions, disappearances and interrogations affecting over 300 human rights lawyers, activists, their associates and family members. He has not been allowed any contact with family or legal representative.

His lawyer, Li Boguang, was denied access to his client. Six months after Hu's detention, his family received an arrest notice stating he is detained at Tianjin Municipal Detention Center Number 1 on suspicion of "subversion of state power," which carries a maximum penalty of life imprisonment. Seven other individuals formally arrested this month face the same accusation; three more are accused of "inciting subversion of state power," which incurs a maximum of 15 years in prison.

In 1992, Hu Shigen was arrested and later convicted of "leading a counterrevolutionary organization" and "counterrevolutionary propaganda," apparently in connection with activities promoting labor rights and democracy. He was sentenced to 20 years in prison and five years deprivation of political rights. Hu's sentence was reduced several times. He was finally released in 2008.

Hu is an elder at an unregistered Protestant church in Beijing. According to the US Congressional-Executive Commission on China, Hu was detained with two other members of this church, Liu Yongping and Gou Hongguo, while they were preparing to attend a church gathering. Both Liu and Gou were originally accused of "picking quarrels and provoking troubles." That was later changed to "inciting subversion of state power." Like Hu, they are being held incommunicado and have not been allowed meetings with their lawyers.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "It is unacceptable that Hu Shigen has been held

in detention for six months without any contact with the outside world or access to legal counsel, while his family was not informed of his whereabouts for half a year. The charge of ‘subversion’ which he now faces is commonly levelled at activists who peacefully seek to defend the rights of others; very often, suspects have restricted access to legal representation and family visits. We call on the Chinese authorities to act in accordance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to respect the inherent dignity of all those detained in the crackdown, to uphold their right to communicate with counsel of their own choosing, and to release immediately those who are detained arbitrarily or who have been forcibly disappeared.”