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CHINA | Legal Assistant Released Ahead of Crackdown Anniversary

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) welcomes the release on bail of 24 year-old legal assistant Zhao Wei on July 7 but remains concerned about those still in detention following the unprecedented crackdown on human rights lawyers that began July 9, 2015. To date, over 300 lawyers and their colleagues and families have been arrested, interrogated or disappeared at some point over the course of the year.

Many have now been released from prison but over 20 remain in detention and incommunicado. Their families continue to seek access to their loved ones and justice in their cases. On July 4, some prisoners' wives protested outside the detention center, demanding to see their husbands. Seven lawyers' wives also issued a joint statement calling for the release of all the detainees, a stop to monitoring and harassment of their families, and for the rights of the detainees and their families to be respected.

The circumstances of Zhao Wei's release on bail and her future remain uncertain because she may still face trial. As a legal assistant, Zhao Wei worked closely with prominent lawyer Li Heping to defend the rights of religious communities and individuals as well as other victims of human rights abuses.

Like many of the other lawyers and activists arrested, Zhao Wei faces charges of "subversion of state power," which carries a maximum penalty of life imprisonment. According to unconfirmed reports, she has been sexually abused while in detention.

CSW's East Asia Team Leader Benedict Rogers said, "While we welcome Zhao Wei's release from prison, we note that she could be rearrested and tried at any time. On the anniversary of this crackdown on human rights defenders, we note that Zhao Wei and her colleague Li Heping have not committed any crime. Instead, they advocated for the rights of their fellow citizens and have championed rule of law in China. We join the wives, family members and colleagues of the detained lawyers in calling for their immediate and unconditional release, and further urge the government to stop all harassment and surveillance of their family members."