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CHINA |Civil Society Calls for Fair Trial

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) has joined over 20 other civil society organizations, legal associations and legal experts from around the world in calling on the Chinese authorities to guarantee a fair trial to Li Heping, Xie Yang, Wu Gan and Wang Quanzhang in their forthcoming hearings.

The letter calls on China to abide by its laws and Constitution, as well as international human rights standards, and also raises concerns about the continued detention of Jiang Tianyong, a Christian human rights lawyer who has represented religion or belief communities.

Since July 9, 2015, the Chinese government has questioned, summoned and or detained over 300 human rights lawyers, law firm staff, human rights defenders and their relatives in what is now commonly known as the “709 Crackdown.”

Lawyers Li Heping, Xie Yang and Wang Quanzhan, as well as legal activist Wu Gan, were indicted following the crackdown. All four individuals were charged either with “subverting state power” or “inciting subversion of state power,” charges commonly levelled at activists and human rights defenders which carry heavy penalties, and claim to have been victims of torture while held in arbitrary detention.

Many of the 300 human rights defenders who were arrested or interrogated have actively defended freedom of religion or belief in China and are vital advocates for vulnerable religious minority communities. Li Heping is a Christian human rights lawyer who has regularly defended Christians, Falun Gong practitioners and other human rights defenders. CSW sent a petition signed by over 2,000 people to the Chinese embassy which called for Li’s release in October 2016.

The joint letter calls on the Chinese government to ensure that the trial is conducted in “full compliance with the basic principles of due process, including the right to a fair trial.” This

includes the guarantee of an independent and impartial court, and the presumption of innocence until proven guilty. Although the right to counsel is a constitutionally protected right in China, the letter raises concerns that Li Heping and Wang Quanzhang have thus far not been able to meet their appointed lawyers. It concludes by exhorting the Chinese government to ensure that the four men receive an open trial, noting that even families of the defendants were not allowed to attend trials held in August 2016.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "China's ongoing crackdown against human rights defenders and lawyers is a grave violation that flies in the face of international law and China's own constitution. We join this important call made by lawyers from across the world and urge the Chinese government to give these lawyers a fair trial and release all of those who have been detained on trumped up charges. Many of the people indicted, including notably Li Heping in this present case, have been brave advocates for freedom of religion or belief. The intimidation and arrest of human rights defenders leaves religious minority communities without a critical legal defense. The Chinese government must abide by its laws and constitution as well as international human rights standards and acquit all who are found innocent."