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## CHINA | Pastor Needs Medical Care

A lawyer for the imprisoned leader of Living Stone Church, Pastor Yang Hua, reported that he is in urgent need of medical care.

The lawyer visited Yang Hua in prison on March 20 and 24, and discovered that he was “on the verge of paralysis” as a result of severe inflammation in his legs. Medical staff at the detention center administered painkillers, but denied Yang’s request for injections to treat the infection. Yang was transferred to a military hospital shortly after. Another doctor examined Yang and recommended the condition be treated with penicillin, but this does not appear to have been provided. The doctor also said that without treatment, the condition could require amputation.

Yang Hua’s lawyers have written to the Guiyang authorities asking for a review of Yang’s case. They believe he urgently needs to be transferred to a fully functioning hospital with the required medication and experienced medical specialists who can treat his condition. His wife has also requested to see his medical records but has been denied. Pastor Yang is currently at the military hospital.

Pastor Yang, also known as Li Guozhi, was formally arrested Jan. 22, 2016 on suspicion of “divulging state secrets.” He was tried Dec. 26, 2016 and later sentenced to two and a half years in prison.

Charges relating to “state secrets” are often levelled at activists and dissidents and can entail certain restrictions, such as family members not being allowed to attend the trial. Church members see this as part of an attempt by the authorities to pressure the church into registering with the state-sanctioned religious association, the Three Self Patriotic Movement, or face closure. In September 2016, Yang Hua’s lawyers revealed that he had suffered from serious health conditions as a result of his ill-treatment in detention.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "The consistent denial of medical care to Pastor Yang Hua of Living Stone Church is inhumane and inconsistent with international standards on the rights of detainees. Pastor Yang has repeatedly requested medical treatment, and his lawyers believe his situation to be critical. We call on the Chinese government to release Yang Hua, to allow him immediate access to adequate medical care, and to investigate allegations of torture and ill-treatment in detention. We further call on the Chinese authorities to cease all harassment and restrictions on other church members, and to uphold the right to freedom of religion or belief for all."