

President of the People's Republic of China
Xi Jinping
Zhongnanhai Xichang'anjie & Xichengqu,
Beijing Shi 100017
People's Republic of China

Dear President Xi,

I am writing to express grave concern about citizen journalist Zhang Zhan (张赞), who was sentenced to four years' imprisonment by the Pudong New District People's Court on 28 December 2020 for "picking quarrels and provoking trouble" (寻衅滋事). Zhang Zhan has been arbitrarily detained since May 2020 and has now been found guilty simply for exercising her rights to freedom of opinion and expression, as enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Given the fact that she was previously subject to torture and other ill-treatment, there is grave fear that she might face further torture and other ill-treatment.

Zhang Zhan travelled to Wuhan in February 2020 to report on the COVID-19 outbreak there. She reported detention of independent reporters, as well as the harassment of victims' family members. After her detention, she chose to carry out a hunger strike to protest her detention and assert her innocence. As a result, the detention centre authorities reportedly force-fed her against her will and made her wear leg shackles and hand restraints 24 hours a day for more than three months.

Instead of respecting Zhang Zhan's right to express her opinion and her choice to be on hunger strike, the detention centre authorities punished her in a manner that violated the absolute prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment, going against China's obligations under international human rights law.

Zhang Zhan is a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising her right to freedom of expression when she reported about COVID-19. Although Zhang Zhan resumed eating on 28 December to avoid further punishment, I remain extremely concerned about her health and well-being, as well as the risk that she might again be subjected to torture and other ill-treatment while in detention.

I therefore call on you to:

Release Zhang Zhan immediately and unconditionally, unless there is sufficient, credible and admissible evidence that she has committed an internationally recognized offence;

Pending her release, ensure that Zhang Zhan has regular, unrestricted access to her family and lawyers of her choice and is not subjected further to torture or other ill-treatment; and

Respect Zhang Zhan's right to health, autonomy and expression, and ensure that she has prompt and regular access to medical attention and adequate health care.

Yours sincerely,