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China: Release rights lawyer and end crackdown on civil society

The Chinese authorities must immediately release lawyer Chang Boyang and stop the persecution of civil society organizations like the anti-discrimination organization Zhengzhou Yirenping, Amnesty International said.

Chang Boyang, a prominent lawyer, was questioned on the evening of 27 May and subsequently detained in Zhengzhou, Henan province, on suspicion of “assembling a crowd to disturb public order” on 29 May. He has been unable to access legal counsel since then.

It is believed that Chang Boyang was first detained in relation to his defence of journalist Shi Yu, who was criminally detained on 27 May on suspicion of “assembling a crowd to disturb public order”. Shi reportedly attended a memorial for late Chinese Communist Party leaders Zhao Ziyang and Hu Yaobang in Henan on 2 February and Chang Boyang co-signed a statement to support the memorial.

On 6 June, 11 lawyers representing Chang Boyang protested outside of the Zhengzhou Public Security Bureau (PSB), demanding that the police obey the law and allow him to see a lawyer. However, on 7 June the lawyers were told that they could not meet with Chang Boyang because his case related to “endangering national security”.

The Zhengzhou PSB have since expanded the scope of their investigation of Chang Boyang by targeting Zhengzhou Yirenping. He is one of the three people who registered the organization. According to a statement put out by the NGO, on 17 June, the PSB raided the organization confiscated computers, and detained a project manager, who was subjected to extensive questioning about Chang Boyang. The authorities have frozen the bank account of the organization, saying that it is part of the investigation. However, the authorities have provided no legal documentation for the freezing of the assets.

Chang Boyang, a well-known human rights lawyer, has advocated for victims of tainted milk powder, workers’ rights, equality between rural and urban residents, and fought against discrimination of people with pre-existing medical conditions in employment and medical insurance coverage.