

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/china-photojournalist-sent-on-holiday-05-12-2012,43764.html>

Asia - China

Unwanted witness

Photojournalist "sent on holiday" after covering death of five children

5 December 2012

Reporters Without Borders is dismayed to learn that independent photojournalist **Li Yuanlong** was forced to leave the southwestern province of Guizhou, where he lives, after he posted photos and information online about five homeless children who were found dead from carbon monoxide poisoning in a trash container.

"Sending journalists who cover sensitive stories into internal exile is commonplace in China," Reporters Without Borders said. "Prior to the Communist Party's [18th Congress](#) at the start of November, the procedure was used with many of the best-known independent news providers who are often interviewed by the foreign media.

"The aim of this kind of reprisal is to encourage self-censorship and suppress information that raises questions about the policies or competence of the authorities."

The five children were found dead in a trash container in Bijie, a city in Guizhou province, on 15 November. They had taken refuge in the container because of the cold and were killed by the carbon monoxide generated by the fire they lit inside the container.

A former reporter for the state-owned Bijie Daily who lives in the neighbourhood where the bodies were found, Li drew attention to the tragedy by posting an article and photos on the Chinese website *KDnet*.

The Chinese school system came in for immediate criticism because no one had paid any attention to the fact that the children had not gone to school for several weeks. Six officials were fired after the story was picked up by the national and international media.

Li was given a warning by the police, who told him to take down his story from the website. After he refused, he and his wife were taken by force to a nearby airport on 21 November and were put on a flight to the southern island of Hainan, hundreds of kilometres from their home.

A message subsequently posted on *KDnet* from Li's account denied that he had been subjected to internal exile. Identifying himself as Li, the author of the message said he had left in order to "deal with an emergency situation."

The claim was not confirmed by Li's son, Li Muzi, when interviewed by the *South China Morning Post*.

Li Yuanlong and his wife were finally able to return home after three days of "forced vacation" but, according to a Reporters Without Borders correspondent, the police are preventing them from giving interviews to the media.

The authorities have had Li in their sights for some time. He was arrested by the Guizhou National Security Bureau in 2006 in connection with articles calling for democratization. And he was given a two-year jail sentence on 13 July 2007 on a charge of inciting the overthrow of the state.

China is ranked 174th out of 179 countries in the [2011-2012 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#) and is on the Reporters Without Borders list of "[Enemies of the Internet](#)."

