

# Reporters Without Borders

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Asia - China

Arbitrary arrests

## Website editor, three citizen journalists arrested for covering protests

15 March 2014

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Reporters Without Borders condemns yesterday's arrest of **Huang Qi**, the director of the independent news website [64 Tianwang](#), and last week's arrests of three citizen-journalists who are contributors to the site and who are still detained.

They were arrested in connection with their coverage of protests and other actions that "petitioners" staged in Tiananmen Square in an attempt to draw the attention of officials participating in the annual National People's Congress, which began last week and ended yesterday.

"We firmly condemn the arrests of citizen-journalists and the harassment of Huang Qi, and we demand the release of the three contributors to his site who are still being held arbitrarily without any charge being brought against them," said Benjamin Ismail, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Asia-Pacific desk.

"Every time the authorities censor the public and those who courageously try to report actions carried out by members of the public, the regime reveals a bit more of its determination to ignore and deny social problems despite the growing criticism it is receiving."

A dozen policemen went to Huang Qi's home in Chengdu yesterday afternoon, arresting him and seizing his computer, mobile phone and USB sticks. After releasing him, they went back again today.

He told Reporters Without Borders: "There were policemen from the Beijing Public Security Bureau. They notified me of two summonses and around ten policemen then searched my home. Two of them were even armed. They requested information about the website's contributors who were in Tiananmen Square."

Three citizen-journalists were arrested last week for taking photos of incidents in Tiananmen Square. On 5 March, the day that the National People's Congress began, a woman tried to set fire to herself but police officers intervened and took her away. Thanks to **Wang Jing**, a volunteer reporter, 64 Tianwang covered the incident and posted photos of smoke rising from a spot near the Forbidden City.



(source : [64 Tianwang](#))

The next day, a man aged around 30 threw ink on the lower left-hand corner of the gigantic portrait of Mao Zedong that overlooks the square. The police quickly “removed” the man and set up a 200-metre perimeter in an attempt to conceal what had taken place.

Wang was arrested on 7 March and sent back to her home province, Jilin, where she is being held on a charge of “picking quarrels and causing trouble,” which carries a maximum sentence of ten years in prison.

Two other *64 Tianwang* contributors, **Liu Xuehong** and **Xing Jian**, were arrested on 8 March. Liu, who covered the defacing of Mao’s portrait, is being held in a Beijing detention centre. Her husband told Amnesty International that the police were using Falung Gong membership as a pretext for holding her and for seizing computers, cameras and a computer hard disk from their home.

It is not known where Xian, 17, is currently being held.

Huang Qi has served a total of eight years in prison in two stints since 2000. The second one began in July 2008, when he was sentenced to [three years in prison](#) on a charge of “illegal possession of state secrets” for [helping the parents of children killed in the 2008 Sichuan earthquake](#).

On 22 June 2004, Reporters Without Borders [awarded its Cyberfreedom Prize to Huang Qi](#), who has been imprisoned for four years for criticising the Chinese government on his Internet site.

The 12th session of the National People’s Congress a year ago, when Xi Jinping was installed as president and repeatedly promised to provide “benefits to the population,” was also [marked by a great deal of censorship](#) and restrictions on freedom of association.

Classified again as an “[Enemy of the Internet](#)” in the 2014 Reporters Without Borders report on the Internet, China is ranked 175th out of 180 countries in [RWB’s 2014 press freedom index](#).

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