

Defending Human Rights in the Time of COVID-19

ANNUAL REPORT ON THE SITUATION OF HUMAN
RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN CHINA (2020)



Defending Human Rights in the Time of COVID-19: The Situation of Rights Defenders in China (2020)

March 29, 2021

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Summary

The year 2020 in China was marked by an escalation of restrictions of freedom of expression and access to information, including in relation to COVID-19. Early in the year, authorities blocked Chinese people from sharing information about the emergence of COVID-19. This action effectively [prevented information from reaching](#) medical professionals, the public, and the international community during a vital time for controlling the pandemic. When the outbreak became public in Wuhan in early 2020, millions of Chinese took to the Internet to share information, seek help, or report on the situation in Wuhan and other cities under lockdown. The government responded quickly: with harsh reprisals against whistleblowing doctors, outspoken critics, and citizen reporters at the frontlines. A surge in human rights [violations and ongoing censorship and propaganda](#) were linked to official efforts to combat the virus throughout the year.

2020 was also marked by the increasing control by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the government over the citizens of Hong Kong as leaders undermined the rule of law and withdrew protections of civil and political liberties, thus failing to meet their obligations to maintain Hong Kong’s autonomy. The Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress imposed the Law

on Safeguarding National Security in Hong Kong (National Security Law), without the approval of Hong Kong's Legislative Council, in violation of the Basic Law. The National Security Law criminalized a wide range of activities that are protected [under international human rights standards](#). The law also created new institutions, led by mainland security officials, that are not subject to supervision by Hong Kong's judicial or administrative bodies. Reprisals against pro-democracy activists, legislators, journalists, and others escalated. Incidents of arbitrary detention, police violence, and torture occurred throughout the year.

Human rights defenders in the Mainland took great risks during the year, including at the time of the COVID-19 outbreak, to call out government authorities for their abuses and repressive measures. They reported rights violations; documented violence, threats and harassment; scaled the Great Firewall to access and share information. They brought breaking news to the outside world; assisted victims; defended those persecuted for their views, religious beliefs, and expression; and fought for accountability and justice. For their actions, they faced arbitrary detention, forced disappearance, torture, and other cruel punishment or inhumane treatment. Authorities continued to persecute human rights lawyers and targeted advocates of economic, social, and cultural rights.

Mass detentions of ethnic and religious minorities in Xinjiang continued, as did population control measures and forced labor programs. More information about [systemic rape](#) and harsh punishments inside the internment camps also came to light. Ongoing severe repression by China's authoritarian leaders has led to the growing recognition that officials are committing "crimes against humanity" in the region and increasing calls within the international community to respond. Official efforts to end the use of ethnic languages in Tibet and Inner Mongolia further point to efforts to impose official control in those regions and eradicate ethnic and religious minority traditions and cultures.

The human rights crisis in China, especially in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong, and the increasingly assertive actions by Chinese leaders beyond China's borders, requires cohesive, strong, and united international action. Only by standing up to Chinese leaders' brutality, censorship, and propaganda, and by supporting victims and human rights defenders at the frontlines, can the international community, including like-minded democracies, hope to safeguard and advance universal values – freedom, democracy, and rule of law.

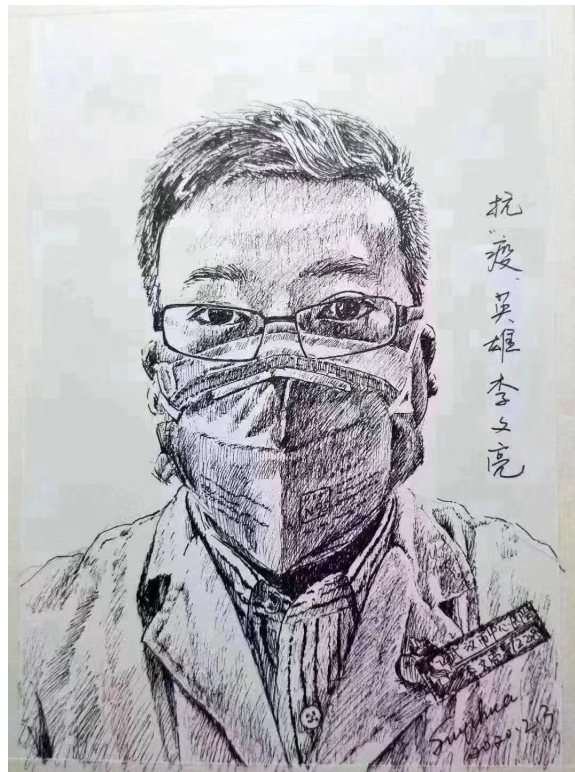
Persecution of Speech & Restrictions on Access to Information

Government Punishes Doctors & Citizen Reporters for Sharing Information About COVID-19

Chinese leaders punished free expression and utilized censorship and cyber policing to control information flows during the early COVID-19 outbreak, and throughout 2020, with devastating and deadly consequences.

Authorities tried to silence doctors' and [nurses'](#) early warnings about the coronavirus and the possibility of its spread through human-to-human transmission during the crucial months of December 2019 – January 2020. The government's downplaying of the risks of the virus was reinforced by widely publicized police actions against individuals who spoke out online. Wuhan

police sternly warned the public with [a notice](#) on January 1 that police had summoned and penalized eight people, including Dr. Li Wenliang, for “spreading false information” online about the virus. Dr. Li and Dr. Ai Fen were among those at Wuhan Central hospital who first shared information and warned their circles of colleagues and friends about the virus. Both were reprimanded and warned to keep quiet by hospital and other officials.



(Pictured: Li Wenliang)

Authorities subsequently [detained, reprimanded, or punished](#) additional doctors, independent journalists and Internet users sharing information claiming they were “spreading rumors” or “disrupting public order.” State censors censored specific [terms online](#) and [deleted millions](#) of posts online and issued strict [guidelines](#) to companies running popular websites and social media platforms about preventing rumors. Dr. Li Wenliang died of the Coronavirus on February 20 and the government swiftly suppressed the outpouring of public grief, condemnation, and demands for free speech online following his death. Central leaders [fired](#) two officials in Hubei for early mishandling of the outbreak. But an independent investigation into crucial missteps that contributed to the outbreak and accountability for those who made mistakes has been lacking. There has not been an investigation into local officials’ efforts to censor information about the emergence of the virus in Wuhan. Nor is it clear why the National Health Commission banned labs from [sharing](#) or releasing genome sequencing test results, and why the lab that first shared the COVID-19 genome [was closed](#), or why or samples of the virus [were destroyed](#).

The Ministry of Public Security [announced](#) on February 21 that officials had taken action in 5,111 cases allegedly involving “fabricating and deliberately disseminating false and harmful information” related to the coronavirus up to that date. CHRD [documented 897 cases](#) involving Chinese Internet users penalized by police including through fines, verbal warnings, reprimands, and detentions for “spreading rumors”, “fabricating false information”, “causing panic”, “disrupting public/social order”, or “disclosing citizen’s private information” in relation to the coronavirus. In 93% of these cases, police cited “spreading misinformation and disrupting public order” as the pretext for punishing online speech related to COVID-19. Police identified the social media platform used in 219 of those 897 cases, and of those identified, 94% involved WeChat, indicating the unsecure nature of the application. Chinese cyber police have closely monitored WeChat, the most popular social media app used by nearly a billion Chinese citizens.

The state cyber surveillance and censorship and mechanisms operated in overdrive in early 2020 to suppress free expression and a free press online. Researchers found that Chinese social media companies such as YY and WeChat, under pressure from the government, systematically [censored information](#) related to the virus outbreak. But censorship was not confined to social media. For example, when the March issue of the magazine *People* (人物) came out, [featuring an interview](#) with Dr Ai Fen, censors immediately blocked its online release and recalled all printed issues, and [there were fears](#) about the possible arrest of Dr. Ai Fen when she was unreachable for several days in March and April after the publication of the *People* interview.



(Pictured: Dr. Ai Fen)

Similarly, police interfered with the reporting of Hong Kong and foreign media outlets trying to report on the outbreak. Wuhan police [briefly detained](#) Hong Kong journalists from RTHK, Commercial Radio, TVB, and NOW TV on January 14 and forced them to delete their footage.

Scientific discussion and academic work on COVID-19 became targets of censorship. The Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention [reportedly issued](#) an order prohibiting medical personnel from speaking with reporters. In April, [media](#) outlets reported that new policy directives were issued to force academic journals to allow the Ministry of Science and Technology to review papers on COVID-19 before publication. Essentially, [universities](#) had to have research papers reviewed by relevant state agencies in order to approve the “suitability” of the paper before publication.

The state-run Xinhua News Agency [stressed](#) “maintaining a clear network environment” over “rumors” tied to the outbreak. [Censors deleted](#) a [number of articles](#). The social media platform WeChat [announced](#) the introduction of special measures for handling “rumors” on its platforms. One *Hubei Daily* journalist was punished for suggesting Wuhan leaders step down for mishandling the crisis.

At the time of this report’s publication, the following citizen journalists covering the outbreak in Wuhan and outspoken critics of the government’s handling of the COVID pandemic remain in police custody:

- Citizen journalist and lawyer [Chen Qiushi](#) (陈秋实) went missing after being taken away by police on February 6 . Chen was reportedly detained on suspicion of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble.” Just after the Hubei authorities announced the mandatory lockdown in Wuhan on January 23, Chen travelled to the city [to report on the situation](#) on the frontlines



(Pictured: Chen Qiushi)

- Citizen journalist and rights activist, [Fang Bin](#) (方斌), went missing after being taken away by police on February 9. He is still being held in a detention center but his family has not received any legal notification concerning his detention. Fang is a Wuhan resident who began posting videos online of life and death at the epicenter of the outbreak and called for free flow of information to combat the epidemic.



(Pictured: Fang Bin)

- Citizen journalist and former CCTV host [Li Zehua](#) (李泽华), went missing after police took him into custody on February 26. Li was released on March 28. Li travelled to Wuhan in February to report on conditions on the ground and posted [videos online](#). He was subsequently [released](#).
- Citizen journalist [Zhang Zhan](#) was [tried](#) and convicted in a Shanghai court on December 28, 2020 on a charge of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” and sentenced to four years in prison with evidence of her criminality being that she uploaded first and second-hand reports on the outbreak to [Youtube and Twitter](#). The court [denied](#) Zhang the right to a fair trial. She told her lawyer that she was subjected to torture.



(Pictured Zhang Zhan)

- Dissident intellectual and former prisoner of conscience, [Guo Quan \(郭泉\)](#), was detained on charges of “inciting subversion of state power” in Nanjing on January 31 and then [formally arrested](#) in February for speaking out online about the coronavirus outbreak.
- Legal scholar and activist [Xu Zhiyong \(许志永\)](#) was detained in Guangzhou on February 15, 2020 before he was forcibly disappeared into “residential surveillance at a designated location” on charges of “inciting subversion of state power” for six months. He was arrested and is now detained in Linyi, Shandong, facing “subversion” charges. Xu wrote an essay which [heavily criticized](#) Xi Jinping’s response to the COVID-19 outbreak.
- Two young volunteers of “[Terminus2049](#),” a Github website documenting censored news and information about COVID-19, Chen Mei (陈玫) and Cai Wei (蔡伟) were [detained](#) by Beijing police in April and placed under “residential surveillance in designated location.” Both were held on suspicion of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble.”



(Pictured: Chen Mei and Cai Wei)

- Police [formally arrested](#) retired professor Chen Zhaozhi (陈兆志) on April 14 for “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” over his online speech about the COVID-19 pandemic.

Other Targets in Efforts to Control Speech

In 2020, Chinese intellectuals, cultural figures, and independent business leaders also became major targets of the Xi Jinping regime’s war on free speech, as part of its broader efforts to suppress public expression officials did not like in 2020.

Noteworthy cases include:

- Journalist and independent commentator [Chen Jieren](#), who was sentenced to 15 years in prison, apparently to punish him for his political speech on WeChat and other social media platforms.
- Filmmaker and poet Chen Yong (陈勇) (a.k.a. [Chen Jiaping](#) (陈家坪)) was [detained](#) on suspicion of “inciting subversion of state power” and put under “residential surveillance in a designated location” after he made a documentary film about activist Xu Zhiyong.
- Filmmaker, photojournalist, and author Du Bin (杜斌) was [detained](#) on suspicion of “picking quarrels & provoking trouble” in Beijing on December 16, 2020. While in detention Du was questioned about his historical research. He [was released](#) after 37 days of detention.
- Publisher Geng Xiaonan (耿潇男) was [seized](#) with her husband Qin Zhen (秦真) in September and [arrested](#) on the charge of “illegal business activity” in October. Geng had [tried](#) to raise awareness of the disappearance of citizen journalist Chen Qiushi, and the brief detention of professor [Xu Zhangrun](#), an outspoken critic of Xi Jinping.



(Pictured: Geng Xiaonan)

- Entrepreneur Sun Dawu (孙大午), was [detained](#) on November 11, 2020 on suspicion of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” and “sabotaging production and business operations.” Sun was known for his outspokenness online. In May 2020, he publicly [praised](#) detained legal scholar and activist [Xu Zhiyong](#), who was detained in February 2020.
- Prominent businessman Li Huaiqing (李怀庆) was [sentenced](#) to 20 years for WeChat comments in November on charges of “inciting subversion of state power,” “fraud,” “extortion,” and “illegal detention.”
- Business tycoon [Ren Zhiqiang \(任志强\)](#) was sentenced to 18 years in prison on September 22. The hefty prison sentence [against](#) Ren is likely in retaliation for his [outspoken criticism](#) of Xi Jinping’s handling of the coronavirus pandemic.



(Pictured: Ren Zhiqiang)

The government also tightened controls over the content on commercial websites and social media platforms. In July, the State Internet Information Office began a [campaign](#) to close down web portals and delete accounts, punishing the portals that failed to practice self-censorship and ban independent news reporting or information sharing. In the second quarter of 2020, according to a [state media report](#), the Cyberspace Administration of China continued to strengthen law enforcement and policing on “unlawful” websites. During that quarter, more than one thousand website owners were warned, 281 sites were suspended, and 2,686 sites were shut down, and 1,226 cases were referred to police for criminal investigation. Web companies closed down 31,000 user accounts.

Chinese officials used social media platforms to reach an international audience while state censors reached beyond China’s borders to punish those using the same platforms spreading comments officials did not like. Even though globally popular social media sites like Twitter remained banned inside China, Chinese officials and state agencies ramped up efforts to use these platforms for propaganda purposes, with nearly all of China’s government agencies and ambassadors [joining Twitter](#). While Chinese diplomats increasingly engaged in an aggressive social media style known as “[Wolf Warrior](#)” [diplomacy](#), Chinese cyber police also patrolled these platforms, to detect and punish dissent.

For instance:

- Beijing activist Quan Shixin (全世欣) was [indicted](#) for using Twitter to comment on the Hong Kong protests in July 2019.
- In Shandong, a court [convicted](#) Wang Yong (王勇) in January 2020, for “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” and sentenced him to 10 months in prison on the basis of his

having “disseminated 1,200 unsuitable comments on Twitter that were anti-Party and anti-Communist Party, insulted and defamed the country’s leaders, and incited Taiwan independence, which seriously disrupted public order.”

- In Henan, a court [convicted](#) Gao Jinbiao (高锦标) in December 2019 two years in prison for disseminating “a large amount of anti-Communist Party, anti-government, and anti-country speech, pictures and videos” on Twitter.
- Labor activist [Zhou Weilin was put on trial secretly](#) in November on the charge of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble,” which was related to his [comments](#) on Twitter and for writing articles for the human rights website Rights Defence Network (维权网).
- Activist Xu Kun (徐昆) [went on trial](#) on December 23 on the charge of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” in Kunming. Prosecutors accused Xu of sending a large number of tweets that “slandered, insulted, subverted and attacked” the country and national leaders.

Combating COVID-19 as Pretext for Increasing Restrictions & Denying Rights

During 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic overwhelmed many health systems globally, the Chinese government propaganda machine churned out alternative “narratives” about its efforts to control and manage the spread of pandemic. Yet, the government did the opposite of what is necessary for an effective response to the initial outbreak of a potential global health emergency – allowing free flow of information among medical professionals, in the press and on the Internet, being transparent about emergency measures, and mobilizing the participation of civil society to assist movement of supplies and first responders. Instead, officials suppressed information sharing about the virus and restricted civil society efforts to provide PPE or offer other assistance. The government imposed harsh restrictions on movement in Wuhan and Hubei province, which did lower infection rates over time, but it was done in such a way that it did not leave time for people to adequately prepare. The government did not respond strongly enough to incidents of discrimination against Wuhan-Hubei residents and immigrants of African descent and also used the unprecedented crisis to gain further [leverage over society](#) by imposing the use of contact tracing phone apps. Throughout the year, authorities intimidated individuals who tried to hold the government accountable for non-transparency and other failures in the initial outbreak and the government forced some human rights defenders into quarantine and denied lawyers’ visits to detainees in detention centers and prisons citing COVID-19.

Chinese officials did not engage with civil society’s efforts in combating the virus to the detriment of the overall response. During the early days and weeks of the outbreak, Chinese police swiftly intimidated Chinese citizens for discussing plans online about providing donations or material assistance. Police visited activists and lawyers to [threaten them](#) in order to force them to keep silent. Hubei resident Gao Fei went missing and [was briefly detained](#) after posting a video messages about ways to assist local residents in lockdown by distributing face masks and PPE. Police [arrested](#) a woman, Zeng Chunzhi, on the charge of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” for organizing local residents to protest against price gouging of essential goods during the lockdown.

The government imposed strict lockdown orders in Wuhan city and Hubei province in January, just before Lunar New Year severely restricting the movement of millions of Chinese in response to the outbreak. However, in abruptly sealing off entire cities and provinces, without much advance warning, the government failed to provide sufficient time for people with special needs to prepare or allow residents to stock up on supplies. Such sudden and drastic measures left vulnerable individuals, including persons with disabilities, [without assistance](#).

Residents of Wuhan and Hubei suffered discrimination and the government did not respond to the [reported incidents of discrimination](#) adequately. State media [reported that](#) Hubei and Wuhan residents who left before the lockdown were refused service at hotels or restaurants. Some were forced to go to rescue centers or homeless shelters. There were also reports of passengers refusing to board planes with Wuhan or Hubei residents on board, or airlines cancelling Wuhan or Hubei residents' flights or refusing services to them. Personal information of Wuhan residents was [leaked](#) and posted online. Some Hubei residents posted on [online platforms](#) saying they were rejected by employers many times because they came from Hubei.

In early April, there were many instances of [discriminatory mistreatment of people of African descent](#) living in China, particularly Guangzhou, during the enforcement of COVID-19 policies. Authorities forced some African people to be tested or quarantined for the virus. In some cases, some African migrants were tested several times without being told the results. Online videos and photos displayed African migrants being [evicted](#) from their homes, refused rooms at hotels, and forced to sleep on Guangzhou's city streets where police [harassed](#) them. They were said to have been denied access to shops, malls, or [restaurants](#) that were open to Chinese customers. The government did not do enough to curb the behavior or enforce anti-discrimination stipulations, despite official [speeches](#) against discrimination, or the Chinese legislative body's [call on](#) local governments to provide assistance to workers from regions hit hard by coronavirus.

Authorities made citizens download mandatory phone apps with QR codes and color coated health status codes to identify and isolate people who had COVID-19. Without a green code, a person could not take public transportation or check into a hotel, among other activities. The apps also made the data available to police officials. In some places, local officials pushed to have the apps remain a part of people's lives, even after the crisis subsided to use as [trackers](#), to monitor citizens' health

Masking up for virus protection throughout the country had initially made it more difficult for the police to continue mass surveillance of the population through facial recognition technology. However, in March, the Ministry of Public Security [reportedly](#) purchased improved facial recognition technology from a Chinese company. The new technology allowed police to conduct mass surveillance by penetrating facial masks to identify individuals and matching the images with names and other personal data.

Chinese police intimidated and harassed potential plaintiffs in litigation who had attempted to hold Wuhan and Hubei governments accountable for failure to timely release vital information about the virus outbreak. By April 22, at least six families whose loved ones died after contracting the virus and one woman who recovered from COVID-19, under [intense threats](#) and [harassment](#), were forced to [abandon their efforts](#) and ceased their contacts with their lawyers.

National security police also got involved in investigating the group of lawyers and interrogated the relatives of an [activist overseas](#), who had been working with the lawyers. About a week before the one-year anniversary of the lockdown in Wuhan officials closed down a WeChat group with more than [90 bereaved family members](#) who had suffered losses during the lockdown.

Throughout 2020, government authorities used the pandemic as a pretext to deny human rights protections to detainees and prisoners of conscience, even after COVID-19 restrictions were generally lifted. In June, CHRD documented [a dozen cases](#) of the government using the pretext of COVID-19 to deny detainees and prisoners access to their lawyers and families members, even including virtual meetings. Special pandemic rules on visitation were not publicly posted online, which misled some lawyers to travel to the detention or prison facilities only to learn about the restriction on site. Officials at these facilities cited – but could not produce any specific documents – to show the “rules” for denying video or telephone calls with families or lawyers. State media [reported](#) that there [were outbreaks of COVID-19](#) in prisons in at least three provinces, but researchers noted that the lack of transparency in prison data made it difficult to [accurately assess](#) the true extent of the spread of COVID-19 within Chinese prisons and detention facilities.

Authorities have also used emergency quarantine powers to detain individuals into secret quarantine facilities, as in the case of citizen reporter [Chen Qiushi](#), or release prisoners who had finished serving their terms, as in the case of [Wang Quanzhang](#). The government refused to heed international [appeals](#) to pardon jailed citizen journalist [Huang Qi](#), who suffers from critical health conditions and is at higher risks of virus infection in prison.

‘National Security Law’ Imposed in Hong Kong Drastically Curtails Civil Liberties”

In May of 2020, while much of the world was largely distracted with the unprecedented public health and economic crisis caused by COVID-19, Mainland leaders imposed the National Security Law on Hong Kong, effectively bypassing Hong Kong’s parliament, Legco. The Chinese and Hong Kong governments initially tried to assuage fears about the potential overly broad application of the new legislation by saying that the law would be targeted. Hong Kong’s Chief Executive Carrie Lam [stated](#) in May that the legislation was needed to plug up legal “loopholes” and would “only target a handful of people.” Secretary of Security John Lee said it was needed to fight Hong Kong’s [problem with “growing terrorism.”](#) A [Chinese government spokesperson](#) tried to reassure the public by saying that the law would only target a “tiny minority” of “troublemakers” who posed an “imminent threat.”

However, when the final law was enacted on June 30, 2020 and the public finally could see the full text, it was clear that the sweeping and vague nature of the law’s language combined with the new institutional powers it gave to newly created Central-government government bodies would give the government an unprecedented ability to persecute human rights defenders, not just people engaged in violence posing and “imminent threat.” It would become [increasingly difficult](#) for Hong Kong courts, long seen as independent, to protect human rights. The law uses broad and vague definitions to criminalize behavior in four categories of crimes: “subversion of state power,” “secession,” “terrorism,” and “collusion with a foreign power or with external elements to endanger national security.” Just as significantly, the new law [created two new](#)

[institutions](#) – the Central Government Office for the Preservation of National Security in Hong Kong and a local counterpart, the Hong Kong Committee on Preserving National Security – which gave the Central government mechanisms to handle day-to-day affairs in Hong Kong in an unprecedented manner.

This move sent a clear signal that the Chinese government was determined to crush the pro-democracy protests that engulfed Hong Kong in 2019 and undermine the civil-political rights that the Hong Kong government had the obligation to protect given Hong Kong had ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The new law's implementation proved its [harmful impact](#) on Hong Kong's vibrant civil society.

The reprisals against pro-democracy individuals, however, started earlier than the imposition of the National Security Law. In January 2020, three human rights observers were [arrested](#) in Hong Kong during the police's dispersal operation and then arrested for "taking part in an unlawful assembly." In April, police [arrested](#) 15 pro-democracy and civil society leaders, including lawyers Martin Lee and Albert Ho, and media tycoon Jimmy Lai, on suspicion of "assisting in organizing and taking part in unauthorized assembly" or "announcing unauthorized marches" held in 2019.

Soon after the National Security Law took effect, in August, 12 Hong Kong activists were intercepted at sea by China's Coast Guard on 23 August while trying to escape from persecution and were detained in mainland China. The detainees were held for months without any communication with their families or access to lawyers of their choice. Police in Shenzhen [formally arrested](#) them on September 30 – two faced charges of "organizing others to illegally cross the border," and all 12 were charged with "illegally crossing the border." Ten of them were [convicted](#) in December in a closed-door trial.

Around the year's end, the [situation](#) in Hong Kong deteriorated to an alarming low point. The National Security Law was used against peaceful protesters, independent media, and democratically elected legislators, affecting the core of Hong Kong's rule of law system.

- Hong Kong police [arrested](#) eight pro-democracy politicians, including former and current legislators, in November and in the same month, the government [disqualified](#) four pro-democracy legislators from being on the Legislative Council;
- Also in November, a TV producer was [arrested](#) and [accused](#) of making false statements to obtain vehicle records for a TV documentary;
- A student journalist was [charged](#) with obstructing police and resisting arrest during a protest in May 2020;
- Another journalist was [arrested](#) in November for her coverage of clashes between police and protesters during the May protest;
- At the end of 2020, an activist [received](#) a four-month prison sentence upon conviction under the new National Security Law for "unlawful assembly" and "desecrating the national flag" in 2019.

Persecution of Mainland Human Rights Defenders

Arbitrary Detention

By the end of 2020, a group of defenders in China had [documented 1,021](#) cases of prisoners of conscience—individuals in pretrial detention, in prison, or forced disappearance, including some cases in Xinjiang, Tibet, and other ethnic minority regions – for defending or exercising human rights. Of the 1,021 cases of prisoners/detainees of conscience, 9 individuals were serving a death sentence with reprieve; 19 were serving life-in-prison; and 132 were serving long sentences, from 10 years to 25 years, in 2020. Of the total, 126 people remained in pre-trial detention by the end of 2020, according to this group. The 1,021 cases are the total number of documented cases since the group started reporting on cases five years ago. A CHRD [analysis](#) of the above-mentioned [data set](#), with additional verifiable cases, bring the total number of cases of detention of prisoners of conscience to [1,190 cases](#) by the end of 2020. These numbers have taken into account the number of people who were confirmed to have been released during 2020. Hundreds of people were released throughout the year, while hundreds more were detained or imprisoned.

The group of defenders inside China has monitored and documented cases under risky conditions, with very limited access to information. The actual number of people in arbitrary detention in 2020 is likely much higher. For instance, there are likely many more detainees among the reportedly [at least one million](#) Uyghur and other Turkic Muslim minorities forced into “re-education” internment camps since 2017-18.

The numbers also do not include the number of people under a form of commonly used type of arbitrary detention – *administrative detention*. Under this form of detention, police can lock people up for up to 15 days without access to lawyers or without appearing before a court. Administrative detention seems to have been used as a common tool in the government’s knee-jerk response to online information sharing and independent reporting on the outbreak of COVID-19 in the Spring of 2020; 18.5% of the 897 cases that CHRD [documented](#) involved administrative detention.

[Psychiatric detention](#) is another commonly used form of arbitrary detention by authorities to [silence and punish](#) outspoken critics and local protestors and petitioners. It has been very difficult to document, but a group of defenders in China, Civil Rights and Livelihood Watch (民生观察), has managed to record more than 500 cases of psychiatric detention in China in the past few years, including cases in which citizens insisted on filing complaints about abusive officials. The group has faced [serious repercussions](#) and has been forced to abandon [some of its efforts](#).

Two cases of psychiatric detention as a means of political persecution stand out: that of [Feng Xiaoyan](#), who was involuntarily detained in a psychiatric hospital at her husband’s behest after she was picked up by police while passing out pro-democracy leaflets, and that of Dong Yaoqiong, a woman who was detained in July 2018 and forced into a psychiatric facility after she threw ink at a picture of Chinese President Xi Jinping.



(Pictured: Dong Yaoqiong)

She was ostensibly released in January 2020, but at the end of the year, Dong tweeted out an [emotional video](#) describing how constant state surveillance since her release had driven her to the verge of a breakdown. She subsequently went missing. Ou Biaofeng, a prominent activist, was taken away by police on December 5, 2020 after he publicized Dong Yaoqiong's plight on Twitter. Ou Biaofeng [was charged](#) with "inciting subversion of state power" later in the month. It was later [confirmed](#) that Dong Yaoqing had been detained again and forced into a psychiatric institution.



(Pictured: Ou Biaofeng)

Authorities detained leading activists or NGO advocates and accused them of the most serious “national security” crime in the books – “subversion of state power.” Once convicted, these activists face up to life-in-prison. The “subversion” crime belongs to a category of “national security” crimes, which have become a favored tool of the Chinese police, as the Criminal Procedure Law has carved out exemptions for police to apply the already minimal due process safeguards that Chinese law allows suspects in other criminal categories. In June, Changsha prosecutors [secretly indicted](#) three staff members of an anti-discrimination NGO, Changsha Funeng, [Cheng Yuan \(程渊\)](#), [Liu Dazhi \(刘大志\)](#) and [Wu Gejianxiong \(吴葛建雄\)](#) — on charges of “subversion of state power.” Citing “national security,” authorities denied the Changsha activists’ requests for lawyers’ visits and prohibited any communication with their families.

State-Enforced Disappearances

In 2020, police continued to routinely put human rights defenders in incommunicado detention under the “residential surveillance at a (police) designated location” (RSDL) system. Detainees in RSDL are kept in secret locations for up to six months without any access to lawyers or judges or family members, where they are at high risk of torture during secret interrogations. UN human rights experts have [called](#) RSDL tantamount to enforced disappearance and have repeatedly [urged China to abolish it](#).

Our [analysis](#) of the [data set](#) collected by defenders in China, introduced in the previous section, identified 41 cases involving enforced disappearance and 19 cases involving individuals put under RSDL, meaning that, combined, it brings the number of state-enforced disappearances to

at least 60, although the actual number of cases involving state enforced disappearances must inevitably be much higher.

RSDL is only one form of state-enforced disappearance in China. We must also count those detained incommunicado, or forcibly disappeared, by government authorities, in [psychiatric institutions](#), without notifications to their families or any access to lawyers of their choice.

As discussed elsewhere in this report, the whereabouts and the fate of at least two citizen journalists, [Fang Bin and Chen Qiushi](#), both detained in Wuhan in early 2020, remain unknown. [He Fangmei](#), a vaccine safety advocate, who had been jailed previously, was detained in October 2020 and has since vanished without a trace.

The disbarred and previously jailed human rights lawyer [Gao Zhisheng](#) disappeared in August 2017. His whereabouts and fate remain unknown at the time of this report's release.



(Pictured: Gao Zhisheng)

Torture

In 2020, thanks to a few family members or friends of detainees who spoke out bravely, details of torture in several high-profile cases came to light. These details are consistent with previous [reports](#) of [torture](#) by [human rights groups](#).

Detained former lawyer [Ding Jiayi \(丁家喜\)](#) was allegedly tortured while held under “residential surveillance at a designated location,” [according](#) to his wife Luo Shengchun (罗胜春). Yantai City police in Shandong Province detained Ding on December 26, 2019 and put him under

RSDL on suspicion of “inciting subversion of state power.” On June 19, 2019 Linyi City police formally arrested him and he is now held at Linshu County Detention Center in Shandong. Luo received information from a source that police subjected Ding to sleep deprivation with blaring noise and 24-hour fluorescent lights while being held in Yantai.



(Pictured: Ding Jiayi)

Luo further revealed that reportedly over 100 police officers have been assigned to the case linked to Ding, which centers around a private gathering in Xiamen City in December 2019. Police reportedly have released [other detainees who attended the Xiamen gathering](#) on bail following nearly six-month enforced disappearance.

Another detainee, the legal scholar [Xu Zhiyong \(许志永\)](#), who also attended the Xiamen gathering, was also subjected to torture. [While in RSDL](#), in May 2020, according to Xu’s lawyer, Xu’s legs and hands were firmly tied to an interrogation chair, which led Xu to have some difficulties in breathing.



(Pictured: Xu Zhiyong)

According to [Li Qiaochu](#), Xu's girlfriend, who made public what Xu had told his lawyer, during this period, Xu was frequently deprived of adequate drinking water and food. He was only allowed to eat one *mantou* (a bland Chinese bun) per meal, causing him to go hungry. The detention center did not provide proper heating equipment or hot water, so Xu's cell was unbearably cold in the winter. He was only allowed to take 2-3 cold showers per month. Xu told his lawyer that he was [also subjected](#) to sleep deprivation.



(Pictured: Li Qiaochu)

Li Qiaochu herself was summoned by [police](#) on 31 December 2019 in connection with the Xiamen gathering. She was subsequently held incommunicado from 16 February 2020 to 19 June 2020. During those four months, according to [her account](#) after her release, she was also subjected to torture to extract information about Xu. She described being hooded, handcuffed, strip-searched, threatened, and forced to sit still for hours, which caused leg pains and numbness. (On February 6 2021, after she disclosed Xu's torture details in [many tweets](#), police [detained](#) her again.)

In another recent case, activist Wang Yifei (王一飞) [detailed torture and mistreatment](#) at Nanchang Hongdu Prison, where he served a two-year prison sentence on “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” charges for [putting](#) up pro-democracy signs. The prisoners were beaten, held in solitary confinement, where they were tied to stools for days, forced to work, even in sickness, received inadequate and poor-quality food, and lived in unsanitary conditions.

Yet another case involving torture is that of human rights lawyer Chang Weiping.



(Pictured: Chang Weiping)

Police [seized](#) Chang from his home on October 22, 2020, days after he [released a video](#) on YouTube, in which he described the torture that he was subjected to while he was detained in January 2020. Chang also attended the December 2019 gathering in Xiamen. He said he was strapped to a tiger bench for 10 days straight during interrogation and had lost feeling in two fingers as a result of injuries from the punishment.

Targeting of Human Rights Lawyers Pressing for Rule of Law

Human rights lawyers who demanded that authorities respect their clients' due process rights, who spoke out about the abuses of these rights by police and the courts, continued to [face](#) serious reprisals. The punishment came in various forms – from imprisonment, detention, house arrest, secret residential surveillance, to the revocation or suspension of their law license.

Previously detained or jailed lawyers, such as [Xia Lin](#), [Zhou Shifeng](#), [Li Yuhan](#), [Yu Wensheng](#), [Qin Yongpei](#), [Chen Jiahong](#), [Ding Jiaxi](#), languished behind bars, either serving sentences or in pre-trial detention in 2020. The outside world continued to have no news about the whereabouts of disbarred lawyer [Gao Zhisheng](#), who has been subjected to enforced disappearance since 2017. Released lawyer [Jiang Tianyong](#) lived under strict house arrest while police monitored other released lawyers. Authorities detained lawyer [Chang Weiping](#) in January 2020 briefly and then detained him again in [October](#) and put him under RSDL, as mentioned above.

Authorities have suspended or revoked the law licenses of many human rights lawyers over the last decade, including prominent lawyers such as Gao Zhisheng, [Pu Zhiqiang](#), [Tang Jingling](#), [Li Heping](#), [Wang Quanzhang](#), and Zhou Shifeng. Many lawyers have effectively been prevented from practicing law, either for a period of time if their licenses were “suspended” (注销), or permanently, if their licenses were “revoked” (吊销). In 2020, this included human rights lawyers [Xie Yang](#), [Yang Bin](#), [Wang Yu](#) and [Peng Yonghe](#). Lawyers who have been convicted of any crimes are not allowed to practice law and have had their licenses revoked. Authorities make decisions about suspending lawyers' licenses during the annual review and renewal process. Increasingly, authorities put pressure on law firms not to hire human rights lawyers even after the suspension of their license have been lifted. Without being hired by a law firm, a lawyer is not allowed to practice law in China.

Nevertheless, many lawyers did not back down. In 2020, they continued to take on high profile cases the government arbitrarily deemed as “sensitive,” such as defending those persecuted for dissent, for their religion, for their peaceful protests, for their NGO rights-advocacy or for doing lawyerly work. Some disbarred lawyers provided legal consultation to victims or their families. Some law firms sympathetic to the disbarred lawyers have taken the risk to hire them as consultants or paralegals.

Two human rights lawyers took the risk to [file](#) government information disclosure [requests](#) regarding the fate of the eight individuals penalized by Wuhan police in the early outbreak of the virus. A group of lawyers formed a “COVID-19 Compensation Legal Advisory Group” on March 6. They offered [legal aid to victims](#) or families seeking compensation and redress for deaths or damages due to negligence or mismanagement by authorities in Wuhan and Hubei. On April 20, the group made available [a template and a guideline](#) for filing legal claims and assisted a dozen families contacted the lawyers.

Two other mainland lawyers tried to represent some of the 12 Hong Kong activists arrested at sea by Chinese authorities while trying to flee persecution and detained in the mainland. The two lawyers, [Lu Siwei](#) and [Ren Quanniu](#), were punished by authorities by having their licenses revoked in early 2021.

Persecution of Social and Economic Rights Defenders

In 2020, defenders of social, economic, and cultural rights, who make up the bulk of the human rights defenders' community in China, continued to bear the brunt of government reprisals for their advocacy activities. These defenders pressed on in their campaigns to defend and promote labor rights, women's equal rights, LGBTQ rights, health rights, disability rights, rights of the child, equal right to education, rights to housing or land use, and environmental rights, among other issues..

While the Chinese government claims its own “great achievements” in championing development rights and eradicating poverty, it has failed to honor its international obligations to protect its citizens' equal enjoyment of many social, economic, and cultural rights. And many defenders who promote these rights have been silenced, their organizations banned, demonstrations suppressed, and they have been subjected to arbitrary detention, forced disappearance, and torture.

Here are a few examples:

Environmental Activists: Police in Ningxia [arrested several volunteers](#) at a wildlife conservation group in September 2020. Police [announced](#) that Li Genshan (李根山), Zhang Baoqi (张保其), Niu Haibo (牛海波) and 8 unnamed individuals had been arrested for “picking quarrels and provoking trouble,” “extortion and bribery” and “illegal hunting.” The group [used to chase](#) poachers in the desert at night and shortly before being detained, had reportedly accused local forest police of sheltering poachers. In 2019, Li Genshan [exposed](#) that a paper manufacturer had been illegally discharging sewage in the Tengger Desert in Inner Mongolia for years, resulting in an investigation from the Ministry of Ecology and Environment.

Land/Housing Rights Defenders: A Shanghai court reportedly convicted land/housing rights activist [Chen Jianfang \(陈建芳\)](#) of “subversion of state power” in March 2021 and sentenced her to 3 years in prison. Details about the specific court and any evidence against her, or the exact location of her detention, remains unknown. Since being detained in March 2019, Chen has been denied all access to her lawyers and authorities have shrouded her case in secrecy. Neither of her own lawyers were informed of the trial or the outcome and have not been able to reach Chen's family.



Authorities put on [trial](#) [Ge Zhihui \(葛志惠\)](#), a housing rights defender with disabilities, on December 15, 2020. Ms. Ge had been disabled from a beating by a demolition team while resisting the forced eviction of her family from their home. At her December trial at the Beijing Fengtai District Court, she faced the charge of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble.” The prosecution’s case against her included the claims that Ms. Ge had showed support for other persecuted human rights defenders, protested against officials who were interfering in a village election, and posted critical comments online. The court did not announce a verdict. Police detained Ms. Ge in July 2019 and she has since languished at the Fengtai District Detention Facility.

Health Rights, Anti-Discrimination Advocates: Changsha Intermediate Court [tried](#) three NGO advocates from the Changsha Funeng Group during the week of August 31-September 4, 2020. The details of the trial of the three men— [Cheng Yuan, Liu Dazhi, and Wu Gejianxiong](#)— remain unknown. Changsha authorities detained the three in July 2019 on suspicion of “subversion of state power” for their anti-discrimination and health, and rights disability rights advocacy work, and then reportedly [indicted](#) them in June 2020.



(Pictured, from left to right: Wu Gejianxion, Cheng Yuan, Liu Dazhi)

Labor Activists: Reports [emerged](#) in October that labor activist [Ling Haobo \(凌浩波\)](#) had received an 18-month prison sentence. But no details were known including what crime he had been convicted of. In September, [CHRD had obtained information](#) that Ling had been imprisoned following a secret trial. Ling, whose real name Ling Jianhua (凌建华), was taken away by police when he was working at Huadeng Toy Products Company Limited factory in Heyuan city on June 19, 2019. Ling Haobo was subsequently released.

Labor activist [Zhou Weilin \(周维林\)](#), who lives with disabilities from workplace injuries, went on [trial](#) on a charge of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” on November 20, 2020 in a closed-door hearing at Feidong County Court in Anhui Province. The trial ended without an announcement of the verdict.

Food Safety Advocate: Activist Zhang Guobing (张国兵) was put on trial on the charge of “picking quarrels instigating trouble” on July 22, 2020 and [sentenced](#) at Heyuan County Court in Guangdong to 2 years and 9 months. Zhang, the father of two children, had organized with another parent to [file](#) open government information requests in May 2019 about food safety standards in their children’s school and in other districts’ schools across Guangdong. Police [seized](#) Zhang in August 2019 and criminally detained him the next day and formally arrested him a month later.

Vaccine Safety Advocate: Henan police seized vaccine safety activist [He Fangmei \(何方美\)](#) on October 9, 2020 after she [splashed ink](#) on a government building in an act of protest to draw attention to unsafe vaccines that had sickened many children including her own daughter. By October 14, Ms. He, who was pregnant, had reportedly been placed under house arrest at an unknown government-designated location. Her children and husband have also been taken away by police. He Fangmei began protesting after her daughter was allegedly disabled as the result of faulty vaccine.



(Pictured: He Fangmei)

He Fangmei had previously spent months in detention, which the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention [declared was arbitrary detention](#), before being released in January 2020.

Oppression of Ethnic and Religious Minorities

Mass Detentions in Xinjiang

2020 was a year when it was nearly impossible to obtain information about the situation of any human rights defenders in the Xinjiang and Tibetan regions. It remained very difficult and dangerous for defenders in Han-majority provinces or regions to speak out about or document the situation in the ethnic minority regions. Much of the reporting about the human rights conditions in these regions relied on accounts provided by family members, exiles, and analysis of limited data sources.

Despite unprecedented criticism of its policies in Xinjiang by foreign countries, at the Third Central Work Forum on Xinjiang, there were no outwards signs that the CCP would reflect on and/or modify its policies that had led to severe violations of human rights. President Xi Jinping [pledged](#) to largely carry on the policies in Xinjiang currently in place and Premier Li Keqiang stated that Xi had “elucidated a strategic governance model for Xinjiang for the New Era that would be the guiding thought, objectives, policies, and strategic measures today and afterwards for Xinjiang work...”

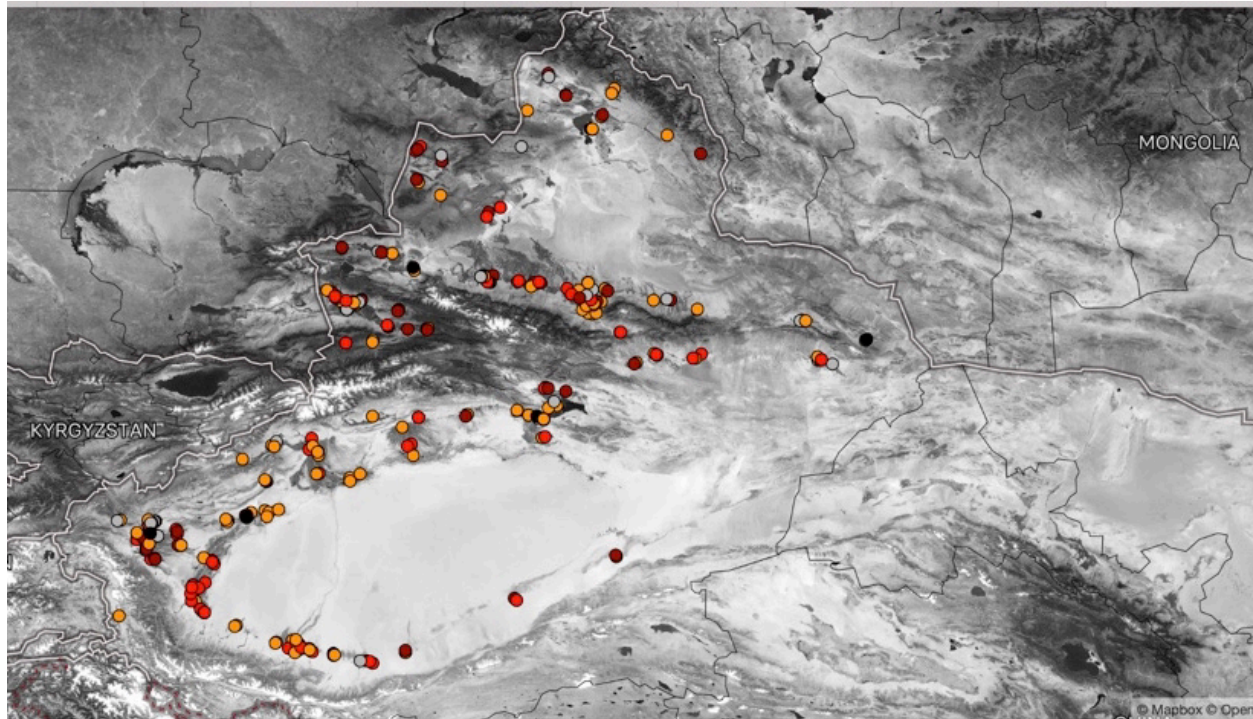
In late 2019, the Xinjiang governor [told reporters](#) at a press conference that “currently, all the students in the ‘three study and one de-radicalize’ program have graduated, and with the

assistance of the government, they have found stable employment positions and have improved their quality of life and are having happy lives.”

This extraordinary claim was remarkable given that the Chinese government had previously denied even the existence of the re-education camps. Regardless, this claim could not be [independently verified](#), as the Chinese government has made it nearly impossible for the outside world to know what is happening on the ground. UN independent experts were not allowed to visit the region without official interferences and then deterred by the pandemic. Reporters who tried to investigate the situation were met with surveillance and were [systematically obstructed](#) from moving about freely. Overseas Uyghurs largely could not assess the status of their missing loved ones back home since the government continued to frequently punish those Uyghurs who communicated with those outside the PRC’s borders.

The fate of many of the at least [one million](#) Uyghur and other Turkic Muslim minorities, who were arbitrarily detained and forced to attend re-education camps starting from 2017 onward remained uncertain. But two new investigations, drawing upon open-source satellite data, appeared to show that the number of detention facilities was growing.

[Buzzfeed identified](#) 268 large-scale, newly built facilities since 2017, some with the capacity to detain 10,000 people or more, according to analysis by architects. Buzzfeed also spoke to former camps detainees, who said that problems of “torture, hunger, overcrowding, solitary confinement, forced birth control” were common.



This map shows the locations of facilities bearing the hallmarks of prisons and internment camps found in this investigation. Note: Many satellite images in this map are from before 2017, meaning that although you can zoom in, you won't always be able to see the evidence of possible camps.

● Locations identified or corroborated by other sources. ● Satellite images — perimeter walls and guard towers. ● Satellite images — walls and barbed wire but no guard towers. ● Detention Center built before 2017. ● Likely used for detention in the past but now closed or reduced security.

BuzzFeed News; Source: Analysis of satellite imagery using Google Earth, Planet Labs, and the European Space Agency's Sentinel Hub

The Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), a think tank, analyzed satellite imagery from [380 sites](#) that were suspected of being detention facilities and found that, between July of 2019 and July of 2020, 60 of them had undergone some form of expansion. While ASPI did find that some suspected re-education facilities had either shut down or become less securitized, ASPI suspected that there may have been a growth in the number of formal prisons being constructed and that detainees may have been transferred to prisons from re-education facilities.

The [Xinjiang Victims Database](#), the organization that has compiled the most data about missing, detained and criminally sentenced individuals from Xinjiang, [has stated](#) that there has been an increase in formal criminal sentencing of individuals in 2019 and 2020, since 2018, the year in which the authorities carried out an unprecedented wave of rounding people into re-education camps or other forms of detention.

Forced Labor, “Bilingual” Policies, Ethnic Minorities Targeted

At the same time, there were increasing concerns that the labor that Uyghurs were subjected to “with the help of the government” was not voluntary in nature. [The Buzzfeed report](#) mentioned above noted that there were factories at 135 of the detention facilities it identified. In total, it estimated that the factory floor size amounted to 21 million square feet. Adrian Zenz, a researcher focusing on human rights abuses from Xinjiang, published [a report](#) stating that there

was evidence of forced labor throughout Xinjiang's cotton industry, affecting hundreds of thousands of workers. [Evidence](#) of forced labor in many other sectors also surfaced and the US Commerce Department added [11 Chinese companies](#) to a trade blacklist due to alleged forced labor or other abuses. According to [the Wall Street Journal](#), at least five social auditing firms, who assess the environmental and labor conditions within supply chains, would no longer operate in the region, citing the restrictions that the Chinese authorities place on their ability to work independently. This made it difficult, if not impossible, for businesses to conduct human rights due diligence in line with their [expectation to respect human rights](#).

[Reuters published a report](#), based on state media and official documents, showing that the government in Tibet had set up quotas for transferring rural laborers into industrial jobs within the Tibetan Autonomous Region and other parts of China.

In July-September, in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region (IMAR), local rights activists [spoke out](#) and organized [protests](#) against the Chinese government's [new "bilingual" policies](#), which would practically replace the Mongolian language with the "common language" Mandarin as the teaching language in school classrooms, in textbooks, and at universities in the region. Ethnic Mongolian parents and teachers throughout the region [joined the protests](#) over the implementation of the new curriculum change. The protesters feared that the changes would result in the eventual cultural assimilation of Mongolians in the IMAR into Han Chinese-dominated society. In August, authorities also [shut down a popular Mongolian app](#), Bainu, and censored discussion of the new curriculum change. There was also similar push by Chinese officials to [replace the Tibetan language](#) with the "common language" Mandarin in schools in 2020.

Ethnic minorities continue to be routinely subjected to unfair trials and harsh punishment in cases involving peaceful political or religious expressions. In these cases, there is no evidence that they have committed an internationally recognized offence. According to the [documented cases](#) of prisoners of conscience by the group mentioned earlier in this report, of the 9 people who were serving death sentences with a two-year reprieve in 2020, three were ethnic Uyghurs and one was Tibetan; among the 19 who were serving life-in-prison in 2020, six were Uyghurs and seven were Tibetans; and of the 132 who were serving long sentences, from 10 years to 25 years, in 2020, many were ethnic Uyghurs, Kazaks, and Tibetans.

[Violations of Freedom of Religion](#)

On February 1, 2020, China's new ["Measures for the Administration of Religious Groups"](#) came into effect, which empowered the government to take an even more aggressive role in managing the internal affairs of religious groups. According to the Measures, "Religious groups must follow the leadership of the Communist Party of China" and "(r)eligious groups shall accept the supervision, oversight, and administration of people's governments religious affairs departments."

The government issued [new regulations](#) for Chinese Muslims who want to engage in the Hajj pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia. Most notably, the new regulations stipulated that adherents could only embark on the Hajj as organized by the official Chinese Islamic Association, while local

governments would have the duty to prohibit “illegal” Hajj tours, thus further controlling the freedom of movement and freedom of religion of Chinese people overseas.

In late December 2019, pastor [Wang Yi](#) (王怡) from the Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu, one of China’s largest and most influential Protestant house churches, received a nine-year prison sentence on the charges of “inciting subversion of state power” and “illegal business operations.”



(Pictured: Wang Yi)

The move to [use the charge of “illegal business operations”](#) against Wang, who has also been an outspoken scholar and dissident writer, was seen by analysts as an ominous sign for the future of house churches that try to operate independently by forgoing official registration.

Christian house churches have increasingly come under increasing criminal suppression since China’s [Religious Affairs Regulations](#) was amended in 2017, a trend that accelerated in 2020.

Hunan national security police [formally arrested](#) Zhao Huaiguo (赵怀国) on charges of “inciting subversion of state power” on April 2. Zhao, the pastor of Bethel Church, a Christian house church in Cili County, Zhangjiajie City, was initially criminally detained on March 14. His current location is unknown. Zhao established the Bethel Church in 2007 after arriving in Hunan from northeast China.

Linhai City court [sentenced](#) Chen Yu (陈煜), also known as Zhang Xiaomai (张小麦), to 7 years in prison on September 27, 2020 on charges of “illegal business activity” for selling “illegal overseas religious material” online. The court also handed down a 200,000 RMB (\$29,500 USD) fine and confiscated and destroyed 12,864 books. Chen ran an online bookstore called “Xiao Mai

Study Room” which sold books about Christianity. Linhai police detained Chen on September 13, 2019. Police across the country questioned thousands of people who had ordered books from the store.

Yunnan police [detained](#) pastor [Wang Hai](#) (王海) in August 2020 alongside his parents from his church in Zhaoyang District, Zhaotong City. Their whereabouts remain unknown. His wife only made public the information on WeChat on October 12 that they had disappeared. Wang Hai had been ordained in December 2012 in an official Christian church, but still has faced surveillance and now detention.

In 2020, the CCP reiterated and tightened its grip over all aspects of life within the regions populated by ethnic minorities. At the Seventh Central Work Forum on Tibet, President Xi Jinping [declared](#) that the CCP would comprehensively implement its strategic governance of Tibet, including a pledge to “guide the masses in erecting the correct view of the Nation, the correct view of history, correct view of nationalities, and correct view of culture, and correct view of religion.”

The Golog Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture Intermediate Court [sentenced](#) Tibetan Lej Dorje (勒智多杰) to 1 year in prison on December 14, 2020 on charges of “inciting separatism.” The prosecution accused Lej Dorje, 30, of using social media to share messages about the exiled Tibetan religious spiritual leader Dalai Lama in 2019-2020 on Weibo and WeChat. Qinghai police initially detained him on July 14, 2020 and formally arrested him on July 23, 2020. Tibetan monk [Gendun Sherab](#) reportedly died as a result of being tortured in prison and denied medical treatment.

Recommendations

To the Chinese government:

- End arbitrary detention of anyone who exercises and promotes human rights in China;
- Revise legislation on counter-terrorism and state secrets and criminal statutes related to “subversion” and “inciting subversion” against state power to bring them into line with international human rights standards;
- Abolish the use of torture and enforced disappearances in all its forms, including the “residential surveillance at a designated location” system;
- Respect the rights to freedom of expression and press, end censorship, dismantle the digital surveillance police state, including the Great Firewall;
- Release all peaceful protesters, journalists, and elected legislators in Hong Kong; repeal the un-democratically imposed National Security Law that violates the ICCPR, which applies to Hong Kong.

To the international community:

- Human rights respecting governments must make human rights a priority in their policies toward China and a priority in high-level discussions with President Xi Jinping and other high-level Chinese leaders.
- Rights-respecting governments, including the European Union, should only consider keeping or restarting their bilateral human rights dialogues when independent civil society groups in China and in their own countries could participate, and when specific objectives and outcomes could be publicly addressed.
- Rights-respecting governments should play an active role in international bodies such as the UN to promote human rights in China and guard international norms against its aggression to weaken key international human rights institutions. Support the [June 2020 call](#) by 50 UN human rights experts for urgent action on China and support international investigations into human rights crimes against Uyghurs and Tibetans and destruction of civil political liberties in Hong Kong.
- Rights-respecting countries should engage in dialogue about pushing for rights-respecting global or sub-global standards for the collection of personal data and for the use of AI-enabled technologies. Democratic countries should also initiate an [immediate moratorium](#) on the sale, transfer and use of surveillance technology until human rights-compliant regulatory frameworks are in place. Such surveillance technology, like facial recognition technology, can exacerbate racial profiling and discourage individuals from exercising their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association. These countries should then limit the sale of technologies of mass surveillance to China.
- Stakeholders of the international human rights community should provide strong and steadfast support to human rights defenders and civil society activists across China.
- Rights-respecting governments should not return human rights defenders or ethnic minorities back to China. Governments should provide ample opportunities for human rights defenders and ethnic minorities to apply for asylum.
- Rights-respecting governments should establish or act on existing targeted [sanctions](#) against human rights abusers with due diligence to penalize key Chinese officials, government agencies, and state-run Chinese companies credibly alleged to have engaged in human rights violations.