

Joint Statement: Urgent Call to Thai Government to Halt the Forcible Return of Journalist Bai Zhaodong to China

July 17th – We, the undersigned press freedom, journalists', human rights, and international organisations, urgently call on the Thai authorities to refrain from forcibly returning detained Chinese journalist Bai Zhaodong to China. This appeal follows confirmation from local sources that Bai, who is currently held at the Suan Phlu Immigration Detention Centre in Bangkok, faces an imminent risk of deportation.

In September 2024, Bai became the subject of an arrest warrant issued by the Public Security Bureau of Yulin City on fabricated charges of "extortion". Since then, Thai authorities have prevented him from relocating to a safe third country and barred him from leaving Thailand. He has been held in immigration detention since January 2026.

If returned to China, Bai would face a grave, foreseeable, personal, and real risk of political persecution, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture, and other serious human rights violations. His forced return would therefore undeniably violate Thailand's obligations under international and domestic torture prohibitions (non-refoulement).

The UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, Andrea Bolaños Vargas, has urged the Thai authorities to "immediately halt any deportation proceedings, facilitate his prompt relocation, and ensure his safety and access to adequate healthcare."

Bai Zhaodong has worked as an investigative journalist in China for more than 25 years, most recently for the respected *Caijing* magazine in Beijing. His reporting uncovered a large-scale corruption and financial fraud network involving money laundering and other illicit financial activities. The investigation implicated both local government officials and senior figures within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Because of the senior officials implicated and the sensitive nature of his reporting, Bai became the target of intensified surveillance, intimidation, and sustained harassment by both local and central Chinese authorities following the publication of his investigation.

Throughout his career, Bai has faced repeated retaliation for his investigative reporting on corruption and financial fraud in Shaanxi Province. Chinese authorities have subjected him to six separate rounds of criminal charges, interrogations, and detention in connection with his journalistic work.

The Chinese government routinely uses vague and politically motivated charges, including "espionage," "subversion," and "picking quarrels and provoking trouble," to prosecute journalists, writers, scholars and activists. China is currently the world's largest jailer of journalists, with 120 journalists imprisoned. It ranks 178th out of 180 countries and territories in Reporters Without Borders' 2026 World Press Freedom Index.

We therefore urge the Thai government to:

- Immediately halt any deportation or forcible return of Bai Zhaodong to China.
- Facilitate Bai Zhaodong's safe transfer to a third country willing to provide him with international protection.
- Refrain from cooperating with requests from the Chinese authorities that would result in the persecution of journalists, writers, scholars, activists or other individuals at risk of serious human rights violations.

Signatories:

1. Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
2. Safeguard Defenders (SD)
3. World Uyghur Congress
4. The Uyghur Center for Democracy and Human Rights
5. Legal Initiatives for Vietnam
6. Global Alliance for Tibet & Persecuted Minorities
7. Grupo de Apoio ao Tibete-Portugal
8. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
9. The Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM)
10. International Tibet Network
11. Aus-Hong Kong Connex 港人匯坊
12. Hongkongers in Britain (HKB)
13. Asian Lawyers Network (ALN)
14. GreatFire
15. International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
16. Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD)
17. Network of Chinese Human Rights Defenders
18. Human Rights Measurement Initiative (HRMI)
19. The Rights Practice
20. Reading UK Stands with HK
21. The Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong (CFHK) Foundation
22. Dandelion Solidarity
23. ARTICLE 19
24. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
25. Center for Uyghur Studies
26. Dialogue China
27. European Values Center for Security Policy
28. PEN International
29. Lady Liberty Hong Kong (LLHK)
30. CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
31. Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)
32. Human Rights Foundation (HRF)

33. Tibet Action Institute
34. Human Rights First
35. PEN America
36. Fortify Rights
37. Hong Kong Watch
38. Bay Area Friends of Tibet
39. Coalition For Women In Journalism (CFWIJ)
40. Freedom House
41. American Society of Journalists and Authors
42. Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP)
43. Society of Professional Journalists
44. Viet Tan
45. US Hongkongers Club 美國香港人會館
46. Milk Tea Alliance Japan (MTAJ)
47. Swedish Tibet Committee
48. Amnesty International
49. Taiwan Economic Democracy Union
50. Index on Censorship
51. PEN Sweden
52. Doublethink Lab
53. Prachatai
54. The Swedish Media Publishers' Association
55. Taiwan Association for Human Rights
56. Judicial Reform Foundation (JRF)
57. Human Rights in China (HRIC)
58. Human Rights Watch
59. Hong Kong Labour Rights Monitor (HKLRM)