

ACTION PAGE

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As the struggle boils between China's increasingly independent-minded and profit-driven state media and entrenched interests inside the ruling Communist Party, journalists and others attempting to report on politically sensitive issues fall victim to crackdowns against the publication of incidents embarrassing to the government.

APPEAL FOR IMPRISONED JOURNALISTS

Cheng Yizhong is a former editor at the *Southern Metropolis Daily* (*nanfang dushi bao*) in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province. The newspaper gained public notoriety and local Communist Party disapproval when it broke the story of Sun Zhigang, a college student beaten to death in a Guangzhou custody and repatriation camp after being detained for failing to carry his temporary residence permit. After the story ran in April 2003, popular outcry forced Beijing to abolish the relevant detention law and order the closure of all camps. Then in December 2003, the paper broke the story of the reemergence of SARS in Guangzhou before the government reported it to the World Health Organization (WHO). According to press reports, local Party officials angered by the two stories sought to reign in the newspaper's investigative reporting. Guangzhou authorities launched a corruption probe into the newspaper's finances shortly after Beijing abolished the detention law. Cheng was detained and arrested in Sichuan Province on the night of March 19 on a corruption charge. He has not yet been formally charged, which some legal experts believe is a sign of conflicting opinions within the CCP.

Yu Huafeng, the former general manager of the *Southern Metropolis Daily*, and **Li Minying**, a former editor at the newspaper, were also targets in the corruption probe by Guangzhou authorities. Yu was accused of embezzling 580,000 yuan from the newspaper's advertising department to distribute to members of the *Southern Metropolis Daily's* editorial committee. Yu was also accused of paying out 800,000 yuan in bribes to Li, and Li was accused of taking bribes totaling 970,000 yuan. Defense counsel for the two defendants argued that the money in question was acquired legally and used for routine bonuses for staff members. Both Yu and Li were arrested by Guangzhou authorities in the second week of January. On March 19, Yu and Li were tried at the Dongshan District Court in Guangzhou, with Xu Zhiyong acting as legal counsel for both men. On that day, the district court convicted Yu of embezzlement and sentenced him to 12 years in prison, and convicted Li of accepting bribes and sentenced him to 11 years in prison. Xu Zhiyong lodged an appeal on behalf of both men, which the Guangdong Intermediate People's Court accepted. The court decided on June 15 to reduce Yu's sentence to eight years and Li's sentence to six years.

Liu Fenggang is a religious activist detained for investigating the demolition of an underground house church in Hangzhou's Xiaoshan District in July 2003 following an official crackdown in which more than a dozen house churches were destroyed and at least 300 Christians were arrested. Liu was detained by Hangzhou City Xiaoshan District Public Security Bureau officials on October 13, 2004 and put under surveillance at an unspecified location on accusations of "revealing state secrets." Liu was formally detained on November 14, 2003, formally arrested on December 4, 2003, and on February 23, 2004 was formally charged with "illegally providing state secrets abroad." Liu was tried along with Xu Yonghai and Zhang Shengqi, two other Christians involved in the house church investigation, at the Intermediate People's Court of Hangzhou behind closed doors on March 16, 2004. On August 6, 2004, the court convicted Liu and the others of "illegally providing state intelligence to organizations outside of China," and sentenced Liu to three years' imprisonment and three years' deprivation of political rights. Liu is reportedly suffering from heart disease and diabetes.

Please join the international community in calling for the immediate and unconditional release of these and others prosecuted for journalistic activities. Please send letters to the designated addresses below, emphasizing the need for the rule of law, free flow of information and the right to exercise freedom of expression. Where necessary, express concern for medical conditions and demand immediate and appropriate treatment.

Cheng Yizhong: (place of detention unknown)

Governor Zhang Dejiang

Guangdong Provincial People's Government
Guangzhoushi Guangdongsheng, PRC

Yu Huafeng and Li Minying: (place of detention unknown)

Governor Zhang Dejiang

Guangdong Provincial People's Government
Guangzhoushi Guangdongsheng, PRC

Liu Fenggang: held at the Xiaoshan Public Security Bureau Detention Center

Governor Lu Zushan

Zhejiang Provincial People's Government
Hangzhoushi Zhejiang Sheng, PRC

Send copies of above appeals to:

President Hu Jintao

Chinese Communist Party
Yongdingmenjie
Beijing 100032, PRC

Prime Minister Wen Jiabao

Guowuyuan
9 Xihuangchenggenbeijie
Beijing 100032, PRC

National People's Congress

Quanguo Renmin Dahuitang
19 Xijiaominxiang, Xichengqu
Beijing 100805, PRC