



January 2021

**Our Next Meeting:
Thursday, January 14th,
7:00pm via Zoom.**

**Contact Ron for
information on attending
the virtual meeting.**



Millicent Fawcett

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Urgent Action: China Covid-19 Journalist Tortured for Exposing Truth

NAME AND PRONOUN: Zhang Zhan (she/her)

Citizen journalist Zhang Zhan, who reported stories related to COVID-19 from Wuhan starting in February 2020, has been detained and charged on September 15 with “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” for which she faces up to five years in prison. Zhang Zhan went missing on May 15 in Wuhan and was subsequently revealed to have been detained by police in Shanghai, more than 640km away. At the Pudong New District Detention Center in Shanghai, Zhang has reportedly been forcibly fed by officials after she began a hunger strike. She is also being shackled and her hands have been bound 24 hours a day for more than three months, and there is grave fear for her health and well-being and risk of further torture and other ill-treatment.

Zhang Zhan, a former lawyer, is a citizen journalist active in speaking out about politics and human rights issues in China. In February 2020, Zhang Zhan travelled to Wuhan, which was then the centre of the COVID-19 outbreak in China. She used online platforms (including WeChat, Twitter and YouTube) to report on the detention of other independent reporters as well as the harassment of victims’ families.

According to information provided by her defence lawyer, Zhang Zhan started a hunger strike in June 2020 to protest her detention and assert her innocence. Despite her intention to continue, detention centre authorities reportedly begun forcibly feeding her through a feeding tube, and it is reported that her cellmates were also involved in the act of forcibly feeding her. Zhang’s defence lawyer also reports that she is physically very weak and suffering from stomach pain, dizziness and weakness while walking. The lawyer also reported that Zhang Zhan is being forced to wear shackles and that her hands have been restrained 24 hours a day for more than three months.

Citizen journalists were the primary, if not only, source of uncensored and first-hand information about the COVID-19 outbreak in China. There are not many citizen journalists as they are not able to obtain the official accreditation required to report news. Citizen journalists in China face consistent harassment and repression for reporting news and disseminating information that is censored by the government.

There have been many reports of independent journalists and activists having been harassed by authorities for sharing information about COVID-19 on social media. These include outspoken lawyer and citizen journalist Chen Qiushi, who reported being harassed by the authorities after posting footage from hospitals in Wuhan, and Wuhan resident Fang Bin, who was briefly taken away by the authorities after posting a video purporting to show corpses of COVID-19 victims.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in China, numerous articles relating to the virus have been censored, including those by mainstream media

organizations such as Caijing and a subsidiary of Beijing Youth Daily. Certain social media posts, sensitive hashtags and demands for freedom of expression have all been quickly deleted or censored.

The crime of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” under Article 293 of the Chinese Criminal Law is a broadly defined and vaguely worded offence that has been widely used to target activists and human rights defenders. Although the crime originally applied to acts that disrupted order in public places, since 2013 the scope has expanded to include online space as well. Anyone convicted could face a maximum of five years in prison.

TAKE ACTION:

1. Write a letter by February 15, 2021 to one or both government officials listed calling on the authorities to:

- release Zhang Zhan immediately and unconditionally, unless there is sufficient credible and admissible evidence that she has committed an internationally recognized offense and is granted a fair trial in line with international standards;
- respect Zhang Zhan’s right to health, autonomy and expression and stop force-feeding her unless medically necessary and legitimately carried out;
- and pending her release, ensure that Zhang Zhan has regular, unrestricted access to family and lawyers of her choice and is not subject to torture or other ill-treatment.

2. Click [here](#) to let us know the actions you took on Urgent Action 170.20. It’s important to report because we share the total number with the officials we are trying to persuade and the people we are trying to help.

Chief Procurator Zhang Bencai
Shanghai People’s Procuratorate
648, Jianguo West Road
Xuhui District, Shanghai Shi 200030
People’s Republic of China
Salutation: Chief Procurator Zhang

Ambassador Cui Tiankai
Embassy of the People’s Republic of China
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Washington, DC 20008
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Salutation: Dear Ambassador

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\$1.20 - Up to 1 oz

Urgent Action: Iran Tortured Sufi Prisoner Must be Released

NAME AND PRONOUN:

Behnam Mahjoubi (he; him)

Behnam Mahjoubi, from Iran's persecuted Gonabadi Dervish religious minority, is being subjected to torture and other ill-treatment, including through the denial of specialist medical care. He is a prisoner of conscience serving a two-year prison sentence in Tehran's Evin prison for attending a peaceful protest.

Behnam Mahjoubi was arrested following a violent crackdown by security forces on hundreds of Gonabadi Dervishes, both men and women, who had gathered peacefully on February 19th, 2018. The peaceful gathering was outside the residence of their spiritual leader Noor Ali Tabandeh, in an area of Tehran known as Golestan-e Haftom, to protest against the authorities' intensified persecution of their community, prevent the arrest of their leader and call for the release of detained Gonabadi Dervishes.

Those present at the protest reported that police and plainclothes Basiji paramilitary forces resorted to beating the protestors with batons, electric cables and sharp objects, and used tear gas, water cannons and live ammunition to disperse the crowd, violently arresting over 300 men and women. Those present reported that security forces raided a nearby five-storey apartment building to which the protesters had escaped, fired tear gas into the staircases, formed a "tunnel" of batons and struck protesters repeatedly on their backs, heads and faces as they violently dragged them down the stairs and into police vans. Pictures and videos from the incident and its aftermath show protesters with lacerations and other wounds to their faces and bodies and bandaged heads and other body parts.

In relation to this incident, more than 200 Gonabadi Dervishes were sentenced to a total of 1,080 years in prison, 5,995 lashes as well as internal "exile", travel bans, and bans on joining political and social groups. In Behnam Mahjoubi's court verdict, the prosecution had cited peaceful activities protected under international human rights law as evidence of criminal activity. The court cited activities such as his peaceful participation at the protest, his forced "confessions" admitting his attendance in what the prosecution called an "illegal" protest, and his alleged membership of online groups that report on human rights violations perpetrated against Gonabadi Dervishes to convict him.

Since imprisonment, Behnam Mahjoubi has undertaken several hunger strikes. Amnesty

International understands that the prison authorities often delay giving his medication to him for several weeks after his family have taken it to the prison. He went on his first hunger strike on July 31st, 2020 and ended it three days later after the prison authorities promised to provide him with his medication. He went on hunger strike again around mid-August for 12 days in solidarity with human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh who was on hunger strike demanding the release of prisoners of conscience amidst the spread of COVID-19 in Iran's prisons.

Earlier in the year, the Iranian authorities had temporarily released around 128,000 prisoners on furlough and pardoned another 10,000 in response to COVID-19, but hundreds of prisoners of conscience were excluded. Behnam Mahjoubi's 12 day hunger strike in August 2020 severely weakened him and eventually led to him collapsing in prison, after which he was taken to hospital but was returned to prison the same day, despite doctors recommending that he be admitted for several days, according to informed sources with knowledge of his case. During the last week of September 2020, Behnam Mahjoubi suffered from seizures, resulting in his head being knocked to the ground and temporary paralysis on the left side of his body.

Sources with knowledge about his case told Amnesty International that a doctor in the prison clinic had pressured him to take sleeping tablets to treat his panic disorder but that they may have been incompatible with his prescription medication and may therefore have contributed to his seizures.

Although the prison authorities had promised to take him to a regular hospital to examine him following his seizures, on September 27th, 2020, they instead forcibly transferred him to Aminabad psychiatric hospital where he was forcibly injected with chemical substances against his will. He went on hunger strike on September 29th, 2020 in protest at his enforced detention in the psychiatric hospital. He was returned to the prison after six days in hospital and ended his hunger strike two days later.

Following his return to the prison, his health declined; the left side of his body had become numb, his legs had become swollen, and he was unable to walk without a walking aid. Consequently, on October 29th, 2020, he began another hunger strike, and two days later, the prison authorities again forcibly transferred him to

Aminabad psychiatric hospital but falsely informed his family that they were taking him to a regular hospital.

According to information available to Amnesty International, the doctors in the psychiatric hospital threatened Behnam Mahjoubi that if he did not end his hunger strike, they would give him electric shocks. He was returned to prison on November 2nd, 2020 and ended his hunger strike the next day. His health has continued to decline since.

The Gonabadi Dervish religious minority are members of Iran's largest Sufi order and consider themselves Shi'a Muslims. They describe Sufism as neither a religion nor a sect, but rather a way of life by which people – from any religion – may find God. The Iranian authorities have persecuted them because of their faith, and they have persistently subjected them to discrimination, harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention, imprisonment and flogging sentences, and attacks on their sacred or important sites, including prayer houses.

Sample Letter

Dear Mr Raisi,

Behnam Mahjoubi, from Iran's largest Sufi order, the Gonabadi Dervish religious minority, has been held in Evin prison since June 20th, 2020. He is a prisoner of conscience jailed solely for the exercise of his rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. He suffers from a serious panic disorder for which he needs daily medication prescribed by a doctor outside prison. According to informed sources, his psychiatrist outside prison has assessed him as being unable to withstand imprisonment and doctors from the Legal Medicine Organization, a state forensic institute, have also confirmed in writing after examining him that he is not fit for imprisonment. In September 2020, the prison clinic's doctor pressured him to take sleeping tablets apparently to control his panic disorder, after which he suffered seizures and partial paralysis. Since then, his health has seriously declined. The left side of his body is partially paralyzed, his left hand trembles and he is unable to walk without help. He has gone on several hunger strikes in protest at his imprisonment, treatment in detention, denial of access to specialist medical care outside prison for his seizures and paralysis and the periodic withholding of medication.

Behnam Mahjoubi was arrested in April 2018 in connection with peaceful protests that took place in February 2018 by Gonabadi Dervishes in Tehran, which were violently quashed by security forces and resulted in

the arrest of hundreds of men and women. Following his arrest by around 20 plain clothes security agents, Behnam Mahjoubi was held for a week in Esfahan and a further 22 days in Kerman. On August 9th, 2019, following an unfair trial before Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran, which used his forced "confessions" as admissible evidence, he was convicted of "gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security" and sentenced to two years in prison and a two-year ban on involvement in social and political groups.

I urge you to release Behnam Mahjoubi immediately and unconditionally as he is a prisoner of conscience, jailed solely for peacefully exercising his rights. Pending his release, ensure that he is given the specialized medical care he needs, in compliance with medical ethics, including the principles of confidentiality, autonomy and informed consent, and that he is protected from further torture and other ill-treatment.

Yours sincerely,

TAKE ACTION:

1. Write a letter in your own words or using the sample below as a guide to the government official listed below. You can also email, fax, call or Tweet them.
2. Click [here](#) to let us know the actions you took on Urgent Action 172.20. It's important to report because we share the total number with the officials we are trying to persuade and the people we are trying to help.

Head of judiciary, Ebrahim Raisi
c/o H.E. Majid Takht Ravanchi
Permanent Mission of
the Islamic Republic of Iran
622 Third Avenue, 34th Floor
New York, NY 10017
Phone: 212 687-2020 I Fax: 212 867 7086
Email: iran@un.int
Twitter: @Iran_UN

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: February 5th, 2021
Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

Urgent Action: Bangladesh

Rohingya Refugees Detained on Remote Island

The Bangladeshi authorities relocated more than 1,600 Rohingya refugees to Bhashan Char, a remote island at the Bay of Bengal, on 4 December 4th, 2020. Despite the fact that it has not yet been declared safe for human habitation by the United Nations, about 100,000 Rohingya refugees could be taken from Cox's Bazar to the remote island. With grave concerns for the safety of thousands of Rohingya refugees, Amnesty international is calling on the Bangladeshi authorities to immediately halt the relocation of more people to Bhashan Char, return those already on the island to their families and community in Cox's Bazar and follow due process, including full and meaningful participation of refugees, for any relocation.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Nearly one million Rohingya, a persecuted mostly Muslim minority in Myanmar, have fled waves of violent attacks in the country since 1978 and sought refuge in neighbouring Bangladesh. The overwhelming majority of them began arriving three years ago, starting on August 25th, 2017, when more than 740,000 Rohingyas fled Myanmar, after their homes were burned, and at least 10,000 Rohingya men, women and children were killed in the Myanmar military's crimes against humanity.

The Bhashan Char, which in English translates to "floating island", was developed by the Bangladesh Navy and emerged from silt in the Bay of Bengal about 20 years ago. "Its dense mat of cellular housing blocks, encircling embankment and the ocean do not suggest infrastructure conducive to civilian life, but rather the kinds of infrastructure associated with incarceration," wrote Lindsay Bremner, a professor of architecture at the University of Westminster, in an article titled "Sedimentary logics and the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh", published in the ScienceDirect in March 2020.

In September 2020, Amnesty International released the briefing "Let Us Speak for our Rights", where two Rohingya refugees said that they heard accounts of sexual harassment at the hands of police and Navy officials on the island. Instead of commissioning prompt and impartial investigation into the allegations, the authorities vehemently refused.

Two weeks prior to the relocation in December

TAKE ACTION:

1. Write a letter in your own words or using the sample below as a guide to one or both government officials listed. You can also email, fax, call or Tweet them.
2. Click [here](#) to let us know the actions you took on Urgent Action 169.20. It's important to report because we share the total number with the officials we are trying to persuade and the people we are trying to help.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina

Prime Minister's Office

Old Sangsad Bhaban

Tejgaon, Dhaka - 1215

Bangladesh

Email: psecy@pmo.gov.bd or

ps1topm@pmo.gov.bd

Ambassador Mohammad Ziauddin

Embassy of Bangladesh

3510 International Drive NW,

Washington, DC 20008

Phone: 202 244 0183

Fax: 202 244 2771 | 7830

Email: mission.washington@mofa.gov.bd

Contact form: <https://bit.ly/2FzcITR>

Salutation: Dear Ambassador

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: February 10, 2021

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

2020, five family members, who represent 23 Rohingya refugees, told Amnesty International that they signed up to relocate to Bhashan Char out of compulsion rather than a choice.

A Rohingya woman on the list for relocation told Amnesty International that she registered to go to the island because her husband is there. As a single parent, with a young child and without any relatives in the camp, she has been facing many problems. "It's very difficult to live this refugee life. I don't have any other option. It seems that the government will never allow my husband to get out of the island," she said.

Two Rohingya families were put on the list for relocation after they reported partial damage of their shelters to government officials and the majhi - a Rohingya community leader selected by Bangladeshi authorities. Instead of having their shelters repaired, they were told that they must relocate to Bhashan Char.

Humanitarian staff in the healthcare sector have expressed grave concerns about the relocation. A Rohingya patient expressed “complete panic” ahead of the relocation, saying he was being forced to go to Bhashan Char. “He doesn’t know whether he’s going to continue to receive medications there and wanted to collect a few months’ worth,” said of the staff members.

Staff of the prominent healthcare facility told Amnesty International that some of these refugees are on regular medications. As it is unknown whether health care will be made available on the Bhashan Char, there is grave concern their health could destabilize.

Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Bangladesh is

a state party, guarantees everyone the right to liberty and prohibits arbitrary detention and deprivation of liberty except with procedures established by law. Article 12 of the ICCPR guarantees everyone within a territory of a state the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose their residence.



New Report Details Ongoing Human Rights Violations at Guantanamo Bay Detention Facility

January 11, 2021 --Amnesty International has released a [new report](#) highlighting ongoing and historic human rights violations at the Guantánamo Bay detention facility, as detentions there enter their 20th year and as a new President prepares to enter the White House.

“This is about more than just the 40 people still held at Guantánamo – it is also about the crimes under international law committed over the past 19 years and the continuing lack of accountability for them. It is about the future, too, as we move towards the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks and strive for enduring justice,” said Daphne Eviatar, Director of the Security with Human Rights Program at Amnesty International USA.

The report documents a catalogue of human rights violations perpetrated against those detained at the camp, where victims of torture are held with inadequate medical care indefinitely and in the absence of fair trials. Transfers out of the facility have stalled, and even those cleared for release have remained incarcerated for years on end. Detentions at Guantánamo began out of the decision to frame the U.S.’s response to the 9/11 attacks as a “global war on terror,” bypassing human rights protections in the pursuit of intelligence gathering. Crimes under international law such as

torture and enforced disappearance were committed against detainees deliberately held out of reach of judicial scrutiny at secret facilities operated by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in other countries or in Guantánamo. The report calls for renewed urgency on this issue, accompanied by a genuine commitment to truth, accountability and remedy, as well as a recognition that indefinite detention at Guantánamo must not be allowed to persist any longer.

“These are detentions that are inescapably bound up with multiple layers of unlawful government conduct over the years – secret transfers, incommunicado interrogations, forced feeding of hunger strikers, torture, enforced disappearance, and a complete lack of due process” said Daphne Eviatar.

Speaking at the Munich Security Conference in 2009, Vice President, now President-elect, Joe Biden told his audience: “We will uphold the rights of those who we bring to justice. And we will close the detention facility at Guantánamo Bay.” He emphasized that the “treaties and international organizations we build must be credible and they must be effective.” A dozen years later, as he prepares to become President, he has an opportunity to live up to those words. He should seize it.