

Petitioner Sentenced for Internet Postings



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Human Rights in China (HRIC) has learned that petitioner Ma Yalian has been sentenced to one and a half years of Reeducation Through Labor (RTL) because of articles she posted on the Internet exposing the dark side of China's petitioning system. Ma's harsh treatment is an example of the recent crackdown by authorities against petitioners.

According to HRIC's sources in China, the decision rendered by Shanghai's RTL Administrative Committee on March 16 states that "from July 2003 until February 2004, Ma Yalian on numerous occasions posted on chineselawyer.com.cn, dajiyuan.com and other Web sites articles falsely accusing the Shanghai authorities of causing her physical injury." The decision also stated that Ma Yalian had "turned petitioning into pestering."

According to sources in China, the main reason for Ma's arrest was an article she posted on several Web sites entitled, "A True Record of Being Turned Away from the National Petitions and Letters Office and the Petitions Bureau of the National People's Congress." In this article Ma provides an eyewitness account of physical abuse dealt out to petitioners by police and officials outside of Beijing's main petitions offices in an attempt to persuade the petitioners to leave. The article includes accounts by many petitioners describing their brutal treatment at the hands of the authorities, providing real names, places of origin and dates of incident. Also included are accounts of petitioners who committed suicide outside of the petitions offices. Ma describes her own experience of physical abuse and humiliation at the petitions offices.

Ma had spent many years petitioning the authorities over her forcible removal in an urban redevelopment clearance in Shanghai. The Shanghai Public Security Bureau previously sentenced her to one year of RTL in August 2001 for her efforts. While serving her RTL sentence at that time, Ma had both her legs broken by police, and has been physically disabled ever since. Ma's mother is said to be concerned that her daughter's hardheadedness might result in even greater injury during her current incarceration.

With increasing numbers of people petitioning the government over social injustice and illegal acts, the authorities have begun taking a hard line as a means of discouraging further petitioning activity, and in recent months many petitioners have been detained and sentenced to terms of RTL. Appeals have been sent to HRIC on behalf of a number of petitioners detained in Shanghai. These include Mao Hengfeng, put under criminal detention on March 16; Wu Qingxia, Wu Jueying and Wu Juejin, who were taken in for interrogation; Zhang Cuiping and Tian Beicheng, a married couple sentenced to 18 months of RTL on November 2003; Sun Jian, sentenced to 18 months of RTL in November 2003; Chen Enjuan, sentenced to one year and nine months RTL on December 2, 2003; Gong Haoming, sentenced to two years and six months of RTL; Ge Lifang, placed under administrative detention for 15 days on March 9, 2004; Wang Mingqing, illegally detained in a basement for 17 days on March 5; Gu Guoping, subjected to administrative detention for 15 days in March 2004; and Xu Zhengqing, illegally detained for 26 days in October 2003 and then detained again on March 8, since

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which time nothing more has been heard from him. Almost all of these petitioners were expressing dissatisfaction with forced relocation in Shanghai's urban redevelopment schemes.

"The government itself states that more than ninety percent of petitioners have genuine claims of persecution and unlawful injury," said HRIC president Liu Qing. "It's inexplicable why the authorities feel compelled to compound the injury with a whole new round of persecution, suppression and injustice. If the Chinese government really wants to improve social stability, it should address the burning issues at the basis of these complaints, rather than trying to clamp a lid on a situation that could boil over at any time."

HRIC urges the Chinese government to end its hard-line tactics against petitioners and immediately release those currently in detention.

Human Rights in China is an international monitoring and advocacy non-governmental organization based in New York and Hong Kong. Founded in March 1989 by Chinese scientists and scholars, it conducts research, education and outreach programs to promote universally recognized human rights and advance the institutional protection of these rights in the People's Republic of China.