

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVIST ON HUNGER STRIKE AFTER TRAVEL BAN

Chinese human rights defender Yang Maodong (better known by his pen name, Guo Feixiong) has been unreachable since the morning of 29 January. He began an indefinite hunger strike at Shanghai's Pudong International Airport on the night of 28 January after the Chinese authorities prevented him from leaving the country to visit his critically ill wife in the US, saying that he was suspected of "endangering national security". With no communication to him, there are grave concerns about his situation and well-being.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Minister Zhao Kezhi
14 Dongchangan'jie
Dongchengqu
Beijing Shi 100741
People's Republic of China
Email: english@mail.gov.cn

Dear Minister:

I am writing to express my grave concern about human rights defender **Yang Maodong**, better known by his pen name Guo Feixiong (笔名郭飞雄, 杨茂东), who has been unreachable since the morning of 29 January. He began an indefinite hunger strike at Shanghai's Pudong International Airport on 28 January after being prevented from leaving the country to visit his critically ill wife in the USA.

I find it very troubling to learn that, as he was told by the authorities, Yang was prevented from leaving the country under suspicion of "endangering national security" even though he is currently not known to be under any criminal investigation. The Chinese authorities had told Yang that they would only allow him to travel if he would first make an "agreement" with officials from the Ministry of Public Security in Hubei. It is unclear what the nature of the "agreement" is, and I worry it could be a tactic to stop him from continuing his human rights activism. A favourable environment should be provided for the work of human rights defenders.

According to international human rights law and standards, everyone is free to leave any country, including one's own, unless a restriction is necessary and proportionate for a legitimate aim as provided by law. Reasons for restrictive measures must be provided in the individual case and not merely based on a generic allegation. As it is currently impossible to make contact with Yang Maodong, I am gravely concerned about his health and safety.

I therefore call on you to allow Yang Maodong to leave China and lift any arbitrary restrictions being imposed on him, and, in the meantime, to ensure he has adequate access to qualified health professionals providing health care in compliance with medical ethics in light of his hunger strike.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Yang Maodong (better known by his pen name Guo Feixiong) is a writer, rights defender and former legal adviser for the Beijing-based Shengzhi Law Office. He has supported various human rights causes in the past decade. In 2005, he participated in a hunger strike in response to a call by prominent human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng for a “hunger strike group” to protest the government’s crackdown on human rights activists. The hunger strike was also a protest against Yang’s earlier detention and beatings that followed his legal support for residents of Taishi Village, Guangdong Province, who were calling for the ouster of a village official they had accused of corruption in 2005.

Yang Maodong has been previously imprisoned twice. He was arrested in February 2006 and sentenced to five years in prison in November 2007 after being convicted of the crime of “illegal business activity” for publishing a book about a major corruption scandal in northeastern China. Yang was subjected to several forms of torture and other ill-treatment while in detention, including being beaten while hanging from the ceiling by his arms and legs and being shocked with an electric baton to his face and genitals. Yang Maodong stated that he was tortured into confessing this crime and that the torture led him to attempt suicide. Yang Maodong was released from prison in September 2011.

Yang was detained again in August 2013 after he took part in a large public protest against media censorship in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province. On 27 November 2015, he was convicted of “gathering a crowd to disrupt order in a public place” and “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” and given a six-year prison sentence. In 2016, he held a hunger strike for over three months to protest his ill-treatment by the authorities. He was released from prison in August 2019.

Yang Maodong’s wife Zhang Qing left China together with their son and daughter and obtained asylum in the US in 2009. Zhang has been diagnosed with cancer and is now undergoing a 24-week chemotherapy treatment after a major surgery in early January.

In September of 2015, Yang won the Frontline Defenders Award for his human rights activism.

Amnesty International has documented numerous cases in which the Chinese authorities arbitrarily restrict the right to freedom of movement and travel of human rights defenders and dissidents. These restrictions include rejecting passport applications citing national security reasons, stopping individuals at airports, and banning individuals from buying train tickets.

Amnesty International has also documented cases in which the families of human rights defenders and activists were harassed and intimidated to pressure human rights defenders and activists not to continue their work.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Chinese, English
You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 1 April 2021
Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: [Yang Maodong aka Guo Feixiong] (he/him)