

Hearing Before the Congressional-Executive Commission on China

“The Beijing Olympics and the Faces of Repression”

February 3, 2022

Testimony of Sophie Luo, Wife of Detained Lawyer Ding Jiaxi

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Cochairman, and distinguished Members of the Commission, thank you so much for holding this hearing! Today, I will be telling you about the cases of my husband **Ding Jiaxi** and several other rights defenders who are currently in detention in China in connection to a crackdown after a private gathering in December 2019.

My husband **Ding Jiaxi** is a human rights lawyer and activist. He met leading law scholar **Xu Zhiyong** in Beijing in late 2011, and the two led together the New Citizens Movement. Their ideas and activities centered on getting Chinese people to take their rights of citizen protected under the Chinese Constitution seriously, practice them in everyday life, and become real citizens of the country. They advocated official transparency, such as the disclosure of government officials’ financial assets, and called for equal access to education for the children of migrant workers. They did not try to formally register as an organization—they would not have gotten permission to register in any case. They saw the project as a bigger civil rights movement. Their peaceful and lawful activities in 2012 and 2013, however, resulted in official prosecution. Xu Zhiyong and Ding Jiaxi were sentenced 4-year and 3.5-year prison respectively, for allegedly “gathering a crowd to disrupt public order”.

After they served the sentences and were released from prison, Xu Zhiyong and Ding Jiaxi resumed their activities to promote civil rights. They changed the name of the New Citizens Movement to China Citizen Movement to attract more people to it. They reached out to citizens around the country who shared the same aspirations and continued to promote the growth of civil society. But their activism caught the attention of the authorities again. After a two-day private gathering in Xiamen city in Fujian Province with around 20 lawyers and friends on December 7 and 8, 2019, Chinese police detained Ding Jiaxi on December 26, 2019, and Xu Zhiyong on February 15, 2020, and held them under a police measure called “residential surveillance at a designated location” (RSDL). While held in RSDL, both Ding Jiaxi and Xu Zhiyong were subjected to torture and ill-treatment, including but not limited to prolonged sleep deprivation, loud noise harassment, interrogation while being strapped tightly to an iron “tiger chair,” food and water restrictions, no exposure to sunlight, and no showers. In fact, all the other December 2019 gathering participants were either summoned, detained, threatened, or sent to RSDL and tortured before being released. Some were coerced to testify against Ding Jiaxi and Xu Zhiyong. If you have questions about RSDL, I can discuss this in detail later.

In June 2020, both men were formally arrested on suspicion of “inciting subversion of state power” and transferred to the Linshu Detention Center under the jurisdiction of Linyi City, Shandong Province, where they continued to suffer physical and mental abuses. Some of you may remember Linyi city as the home of Chen Guangcheng and the torture and abuse he suffered there. In January 2021, Ding Jiaxi and Xu Zhiyong finally were able to meet with their lawyers by video after 13 and 11 months in secret detention.

Their lawyers were forced to sign confidentiality agreements that forbade them from copying case files, discussing case details, interviewing with media, or speaking publicly about the cases.

In August 2021, both men were indicted and charged with “subversion of state power,” a more serious crime. The citizens movement is labeled as an illegal organization; articles Xu Zhiyong wrote, an unfinished documentary about the citizens movement, a website managed by a friend abroad, online seminars on non-violent protest, and the Xiamen gathering all became the so-called evidence against them.

I mentioned that others were detained as part of the 1226 Xiamen Gathering crackdown. I will mention two people who are now in detention, not those already released.

1. **Chang Weiping** is a human right lawyer from Shaanxi Province; he was placed under RSDL for 10 days in January 2020 after participating the Xiamen gathering in December 2019. However, authorities detained him again after he posted a video about the brutal torture he was subjected to. He was sent to RSDL again in October 2020 under charge of “subversion of state power” and was tortured again and denied access to a lawyer for 11 months. Chang is from a younger generation of rights lawyers. He has represented Falun Gong practitioners, and cases of gender and workplace discrimination against people with HIV/AIDS, among others.
2. **Miss Li Qiaochu** is a labor and feminist rights advocate. She didn't attend the December 2019 gathering in Xiamen, but authorities held her in RSDL for 4 months in 2020 simply because she was Xu Zhiyong's fiancée. When she learned from Xu Zhiyong's lawyer that officials had tortured him, she posted this on social media. Security authorities detained her again in February 2021 under charge of “inciting subversion of the state power” for exposing Xu Zhiyong's torture, and for disclosing the mistreatment and the corruption of the Linshu Detention Center. She was denied access to lawyers for another 6 months. In the past, Miss Li has publicly discussed her struggle with depression—she reportedly has not received appropriate medical care while in detention and her Mother's requests for her to be released on bail have been refused.

Ding Jiayi, Xu Zhiyong, Chang Weiping, and Li Qiaochu have committed no crime. Why is the Chinese government and Communist Party so afraid when Chinese citizens promote rule of law, public participation, and the growth of civil society? Why is it considered “subversion” to call for human rights like freedom of expression and freedom of religion?

Senator Merkley, Congressman McGovern, and Members of the Commission, I am an engineer by training and by profession. I would never have imagined that I would be here in Washington, DC, telling members of Congress about my husband and our friends who are under persecution. This is not something I have ever done before. I want to sincerely thank you for holding this Hearing on the eve of the Beijing Olympics and thank the Commission for continuing to advocate for political prisoners like my husband Ding Jiayi.