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China: Human rights activist sentenced to three years' imprisonment

On 18 July, 2017 human rights defender **Wang Fang (王芳)** received a three-year prison sentence for “*picking quarrels and provoking troubles*” after she participated in a group photograph taken in support of detained Chinese activist **Wu Gan**. This sentence was announced five months after the defender’s trial, and just one week prior to the two-year anniversary of Wang Fang’s arrest.

[Wang Fang](#) began her human rights defense in 2012, campaigning for her own rights after the forced demolition of her home by the Wuhan city government. Her experiences as a petitioner soon led her to take on advocacy for the cases of others, and she has participated in numerous human rights demonstrations since 2013, including the [2013 protest](#) in support of press freedom outside the offices of China’s Southern Weekly news publication. The defender has also has joined advocacy movements for rights activists, victims of religious persecution, and victims of arbitrary detention.

On 18 July, 2017 human rights defender Wang Fang received a three-year prison sentence. This sentence was announced five months after the defender’s trial, and just one week prior to the two-year anniversary of Wang Fang’s arrest. The human rights defender was found guilty of “*picking quarrels and provoking troubles*” for participating in a group photograph taken in support of detained Chinese activist [Wu Gan](#). On the day of the announcement of the defender’s verdict, local police cordoned off several roads around the courthouse and prevented activists from approaching the building.

On 25 July 2015, Wang Fang had joined a small group of activists to take a group photo in front of Wuhan’s landmark Yellow Crane Tower. All of the activists pictured wore t-shirts bearing the image of Wu Gan, a Chinese activist detained in May 2015. Three days later, during Wang Fang’s visit to the home of a fellow activist, over 20 Wuhan national security officers raided the activist’s residence and took Wang Fang into custody. Before reaching the end of her 15-day detention limit, Wang Fang was placed under criminal detention on 8 August, 2015. Wang Fang’s trial was scheduled for December 2016 and later rescheduled, purportedly to thwart foreign diplomats’ intentions to attend the trial.

Despite numerous attempts by the police and court systems to urge Wang Fang to “confess” to her crimes in exchange for a lighter sentence, the defender refused to do so, remarking that it was her right to wear the t-shirt and to show support for imprisoned human rights lawyer. On the day of Wang Fang’s rescheduled February trial, over a dozen supporters were detained outside the courthouse.

Front Line Defenders condemns the Chinese government’s prolonged and arbitrary detention of Wang Fang, her sentence as well as her continued judicial harassment as it believes that these actions are committed solely to impede Wang Fang’s peaceful work advocating for the rights and freedom of others.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in China to:

1. Immediately release and quash the sentence against Wang Fang as it is believed that it is solely motivated by her legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;

2. Adhere to all requirements under Chinese and international law regarding procedural rights of criminal suspects;

3. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in China and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.