

15 February 2017

China: Human rights defender on trial for “insulting state authority and the socialist system”

On 15 February 2017 court proceedings began for **Kwon Pyong**, a human rights defender who was arrested on 1 October 2016 and accused of inciting subversion of state power. Cited as evidence in official court documents are Kwon Pyong’s Facebook and Twitter posts, containing speeches, images, and videos “insulting state authority and the socialist system”, as well as a photograph of Kwon Pyong wearing a T-shirt criticizing the president of China, Xi Jinping.

[Kwon Pyong](#), a 29 year-old native of China’s Jilin Province, completed his undergraduate studies in the United States and has maintained an active presence on Facebook and Twitter since his return to China in 2012. He has actively campaigned for detained lawyers and other human rights defenders targeted in China’s 2015 “709” crackdown, and has been involved in solidarity actions for a number of jailed human rights lawyers. He has spoken out against the 1989 Tiananmen Massacre and the more recent persecution of dispossessed residents of China’s Wukan village. In 2014, Kwon Pyong travelled to Hong Kong to participate in the “Occupy Hong Kong” movement calling for open democratic elections in the region.

On the evening of 1 October 2016, Kwon Pyong was arrested by secret police and has been held in incommunicado detention for four months. Earlier this week, Kwon Pyong’s lawyers were refused access to him, and the court trying Kwon Pyong withheld notification of today’s trial date from the human rights defender’s lawyers. Kwon Pyong’s lawyers were similarly unable to attend the first day of the human rights defender’s trial and it is unclear who, if anyone, is providing Kwon Pyong’s legal defense. The criminal charge of inciting subversion of state power is commonly used by the Chinese government against human rights defenders. This charge carries a criminal sentence of up to 15 years imprisonment.

On 8 September 2016, Kwon Pyong began sending regular security updates to a friend based in the United States after realizing that he was being followed by authorities. Earlier in the year, he had been called in to speak to state security forces after writing postcards to detained lawyers. On 30 September 2016, Kwon Pyong informed friends that he planned to wear a T-shirt bearing the hashtag “#Xitler” and other phrases criticising Chinese president Xi Jinping during the anniversary of communist China’s founding the following day. He was taken from his home by police later that evening and has since been charged with “subverting state power”; among the evidence submitted are Kwon Pyong’s Facebook and Twitter posts and the aforementioned T-shirt.

Front Line Defenders strongly condemns the arrest and judicial proceedings against Kwon Pyong, as it is believed they are solely intended to obstruct his peaceful and legitimate work publicizing human rights abuses and advocating for human rights defenders in China.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in China to:

1. Immediately drop all charges against Kwon Pyong as it is believed that they are solely motivated by his legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;

2. Ensure that the treatment of Kwon Pyong, while in detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the 'Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment', adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;
3. Allow Kwon Pyong immediate and unfettered access to his lawyers;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in China are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.