

15 February 2018

## **China: Environmental defender Chen Wuquan placed under criminal detention**

On 9 February 2018, human rights defender **Chen Wuquan (陈武权)** and five others from his village were arrested for taking action against illegal land appropriation and reclamation in the tidal zones adjacent to their village. Chen Wuquan and his colleagues were taken into custody after responding to a summons for questioning with local law enforcement. They are currently being held at Mazhang District Detention Centre (also in Zhanjiang City) under suspicion of “picking quarrels and provoking troubles”, a charge frequently used by Chinese authorities to justify arresting human rights defenders.

[Chen Wuquan](#) is a resident of Diaoluocun, a small village located in the north east of Donghai Island in southern China. Chen Wuquan initially worked as a police officer for seven years, but in 2005 he left the police force to become a lawyer. He developed an interest in human rights, receiving training on international human rights mechanisms, and representing cases of land appropriation and religious freedom. In 2012, Chen Wuquan agreed to act as legal defense for Chen Kegui, the nephew of and advocate for China’s intensely persecuted “barefoot lawyer” Chen Guangcheng. For his association with Chen Kegui’s case, and by association the highly sensitive case of Chen Guangcheng, Chen Wuquan was disbarred and his legal license rescinded.

In 2017, Chen Wuquan learned through government information requests that the tidal flats around his village had been illegally acquired without the free, informed and prior consent of the affected communities. The tidal flats are now being used as an industrial dumping ground, thereby violating the villagers’ right to livelihood by depriving them of zones traditionally used for fishing. In October 2017, Chen Wuquan initiated “War to Protect the Sea”, mobilizing his fellow villagers in a campaign to defend the seaside and request government action.

On 11 February 2018, Chen Wuquan’s family received notice from the Zhanjiang City Public Security Bureau that the defender had been placed under criminal detention in Mazhang District Detention Centre on suspicion of “picking quarrels and provoking troubles”.

On 9 February 2018, Chen Wuquan and six others were called in for questioning for “obstructing public works.” One of the seven was allowed to return home after questioning, but Chen Wuquan and five colleagues were taken into custody by local law enforcement.

On 25 December 2017, armed police and other law enforcement agents reportedly numbering in the hundreds took action against the “War to Protect the Sea” campaign, tearing up vegetation planted as a tide-break and detaining villagers.

Front Line Defenders condemns the detention of Chen Wuquan as it believes it is an attempt by Zhanjiang officials to obstruct his peaceful work in defence of the rights and livelihood of Diaoluocun villagers.

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in China to:**

1. Immediately release and drop all charges against Chen Wuquan;
2. 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.