

**Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada**

NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations



**International Service  
for Human Rights**

**therightspractice**  
partnerships for rights and justice



**The 29  
Principles**



**LAWYERS FOR  
LAWYERS**



**MARTIN ENNALS AWARD  
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS**

## Statement on the arrest of lawyer Yu Wensheng and his wife Xu Yan

28 April 2023

**Lawyers for Lawyers, The 29 Principles, Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada, the Rights Practice, the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI), and the Martin Ennals Foundation condemn the arrest of lawyer Yu Wensheng and his wife Xu Yan. We call for their immediate release and urge EU officials and governments to speak out about their situation, and about the situation of lawyers in China more generally. On April 13, 2023, human rights lawyer Yu Wensheng and his wife Xu Yan were criminally detained by the Beijing police. Yu Wensheng and Xu Yan were on their way to the EU embassy in Beijing when they were intercepted by police officers who told them they had been summoned to a police station. Their son was informed on 15 April that the couple had been criminally charged with "picking quarrels and provoking trouble".**

Around 04:00pm on Saturday 13 April 2023, Yu Wensheng and Xu Yan were on their way to attend an event at the European Delegation. [Reportedly](#), they were on their way to attend an event with the EU Ambassador to China, Jorge Toledo Albiñana. Four plainclothes police officers stopped them from entering the subway and took them to Shijingshan Baijiao police station. Yu Wensheng [tweeted](#) about the summons to the police station while they were being taken away.

The EU Delegation to China confirmed in a [tweet](#) on 14 April that Yu and Xu had been on their way to the EU delegation when they were detained, and demanded "their immediate and unconditional release". The tweet further stated that lawyers Wang Quanzhang, Wang Yu and Bao Longjun had been placed under house arrest.

It has been [reported](#) that on 15 April, seven police officers came to Yu Wensheng's and Xu Yan's home and read the criminal detention notice to their son. The notice stated that Yu and Xu were detained on charges of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble". Their son was not allowed to take pictures of the notice.

Furthermore, lawyers Song Yusheng and Peng Jian attempted to visit Yu and Xu's son to have him fill out paperwork so that they could legally represent the couple. However, there were plainclothes police officers present in Xu and Yu's home who stated that Yu Wensheng "does not want any lawyers at this stage" and that Xu Yan had already hired her own lawyers.

The detention of Yu and Xu may be related to Yu Wensheng's human rights work and his outspokenness about human rights violations in China. On 9 April, Yu Wensheng [condemned on Twitter](#) the long sentences of lawyer Ding Jiayi and legal scholar Xu Zhiyong. On 12 April, Yu [reported on Twitter](#) that the Shijingshan police had visited his home in response to his tweet of 9 April.

Yu Wensheng is a leading figure in China's community of human rights lawyers. He notably defended a number of highly sensitive cases, including individuals petitioning the government for redress of rights abuses, civil rights activists, and fellow human rights lawyers such as Wang Quanzhang – detained during the '709 crackdown' in July 2015. His efforts to protect human rights were met with strong retaliation by the authorities, who revoked his legal license on January 16, 2018. Three days later, he was forcibly disappeared under 'Residential Surveillance at a Designated Location' (RSDL), a day after publishing an open letter calling for constitutional reform. He was put on trial in secret on May 9, 2019; yet, Xu Yan was only informed of his four-years jail sentence in June 2020. Yu was reportedly put into solitary confinement for over 20 months, and was only allowed to meet with a lawyer of his choice in August 2020. On 1 March 2022, Yu Wensheng was released from prison after having completed his prison sentence.

In [a video Mr Yu shared on Twitter last month](#), Mr Yu shared that he and his family had been struggling to rebuild their life in China after his release. He was still subject to restrictions, like censorship, house arrest, surveillance, and stalking during this time and was not free to pursue his legal work. In the video, Mr Yu called attention to the struggles of Chinese lawyers and called upon the international community to keep paying attention to the Chinese legal community.

Yu Wensheng is the Laureate of the 2021 Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders, and a winner of the 2018 Franco-German Prize for Human Rights and the Rule of Law.

**Lawyers for Lawyers, The 29 Principles, Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada, The Rights Practice, ISHR, the Martin Ennals Foundation, and IBAHRI condemn the arrest of lawyer Yu Wensheng and his wife Xu Yan and call upon the Chinese authorities to ensure that:**

- **all charges against Yu Wensheng and Xu Yan are dropped, and that they are immediately and unconditionally released;**
- **all human rights lawyers and human rights defenders are provided with their freedom of expression of political and other opinions in accordance with China's international obligations to respect and fulfil human rights law and standards; and**
- **are able to assist their clients without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference and without threats of prosecution or administrative sanctions for any actions they take in accordance with internationally recognized professional duties, standards and ethics;**
- **the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers are respected, and that lawyers are able to assist their clients without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference and without threats of prosecution or administrative sanctions for any actions they take in accordance with internationally recognized professional duties, standards and ethics.**

**Lawyers for Lawyers, The 29 Principles, Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada, The Rights Practice, ISHR, the Martin Ennals Foundation, and IBAHRI further call upon EU officials, EU Member States and other States to condemn the detention of Yu Wensheng and Xu Yan and to monitor their case.**