



## Legal and human rights organisations condemn the conviction of Chinese human rights lawyer Xie Yang

**The undersigned organisations express deep concern over the conviction of human rights lawyer Xie Yang on 23 March 2026, sentencing him to five years' imprisonment for “inciting subversion of state power.” We urge the Chinese authorities to quash the conviction and drop the charges, as they stem solely from his legitimate professional work and exercise of the right to freedoms of expression and assembly.**

Xie Yang, a human rights lawyer from Changsha, is widely recognised for defending victims in public interest cases, including the 2011 [“Jasmine Crackdown,”](#) the 2013 [New Citizen’s Movement](#), and the [2014 Hong Kong pro-democracy protests](#). As a result of his work, he has faced persistent harassment and serious human rights violations by state authorities over the past decades. In 2017, following the [“709 crackdown,”](#) Xie Yang was detained and subjected to enforced disappearance under “Residential Surveillance at a Designated Location” (RSDL) regulations, during which he reported being tortured. In May 2017, the Changsha Intermediate People’s Court convicted him of “inciting subversion,” but exempted him from imprisonment after he was reportedly pressured to renounce his torture allegations. In its [Opinion No. 59/2017](#), the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (UN WGAD) found his detention to be arbitrary. His law licence was revoked in 2020 following allegations that he had disobeyed a court order.

On 11 January 2022, Xie Yang was again detained shortly after conducting a one-person protest and sharing related content online. His family was not notified until six days later, during which time his whereabouts remained unknown. In August 2022, he was formally indicted on the charge of “inciting subversion” under Article 105(2) of China’s Criminal Law, based on his social media posts on Twitter (Now X) and WeChat, as well as interviews with foreign media.

The proceedings against Xie Yang have been [marred by multiple fair trial rights violations](#). He was denied access to legal counsel of his choosing from January to August 2022; subsequent hearings were held without his lawyers present, and his defence team faced repeated obstacles in accessing case files and meeting with Mr. Xie at Changsha No. 1 Detention Centre. These restrictions significantly impaired their ability to prepare and present his defence. Furthermore, it has been reported that Mr. Xie has been subject to torture, including being beaten, chained for days on end, sexually harassed, and denied food.

Following closed-door trial hearings in [July](#) and [October](#) 2025, the Changsha Intermediate People’s Court in Hunan Province [sentenced Xie Yang on 23 March 2026](#) to five years’ imprisonment and a fine of 100,000 yuan (approximately USD 14,500). The conviction relied primarily on his online expression, including WeChat posts and interviews with foreign media. These proceedings occurred after more than four years of prolonged pretrial detention, during which authorities repeatedly extended his detention 13 times. Mr. Xie remains imprisoned, and with time served, is expected to be released in January 2027.



In its recent [Opinion 73/2025](#), the UN WGAD found Xie Yang's detention arbitrary, noting repeated and serious violations of international human rights law, with patterns consistent with those identified in its earlier opinion on his previous detention. The Working Group concluded that his imprisonment stems directly from his exercise of his rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, the charges against him were based on vague, overbroad laws lacking a clear legal basis, and that serious procedural violations undermined the possibility of a fair trial, including enforced disappearance, denial of legal counsel, torture, and prolonged pretrial detention. Notably, the UN WGAD also found that his deprivation of liberty was discriminatory, based on his political opinions as well as his status as a human rights lawyer. This case reflects a broader, systematic pattern of repression against human rights lawyers in China, particularly evident since the 2015 "709 crackdown," during which approximately 300 legal professionals and human rights defenders were targeted through enforced disappearance, torture, arbitrary detention, and disbarment. Moreover, [vaguely defined national security laws are systematically used](#) to criminalise the legitimate work and protected expression of lawyers and human rights defenders.

The conviction of Xie Yang constitutes a clear failure by the People's Republic of China to uphold its international legal obligations and respect established human rights standards. His right to liberty and security of person is protected under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, Article 9) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, Article 9), to which China is a signatory and is bound by the principle of good faith to refrain from acts that would defeat the treaty's object and purpose. His right to a fair trial is guaranteed under UDHR Article 10 and ICCPR Article 14. His right to freedom of expression is protected under Article 35 of China's Constitution, UDHR Article 19, and ICCPR Article 19. The prohibition of torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment is enshrined in UDHR Article 5 and the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT, ratified by China on 4 October 1988).

Furthermore, according to Articles 16 and 23 of the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, governments must ensure that lawyers can perform their professional duties without intimidation, harassment, or improper interference, and without fear of prosecution for actions taken in accordance with recognised professional duties and ethics. Lawyers are also entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association, and assembly, including the right to participate in public discussion on justice and human rights.

In light of the above, the undersigned organisations call on China's authorities to:

- Immediately and unconditionally release Xie Yang and quash his conviction, as it stems from his legitimate professional activities and exercise of his right to freedom of expression.



- Halt all acts of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and ensure he receives prompt medical care and rehabilitation.
- Ensure immediate, regular, and unfettered access to legal counsel of his choosing and communication with his family.
- Cease all harassment, intimidation, and politically motivated prosecutions against lawyers, upholding their right to perform professional duties without interference and their right to exercise freedoms of expression, association, and assembly.

The undersigned organisations will continue to closely monitor Xie Yang's situation and the broader pattern of repression against lawyers and human rights defenders in China.

Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L)

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada (LRWC)

Asian Lawyers Network (ALN)

International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)

Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (Conseil des Barreaux Européens, CCBE)

Network of Chinese Human Rights Defenders (CHRD)