

URGENT ACTION

COVID-19 ACTIVIST HELD INCOMMUNICADO

Chen Mei, along with two other contributors to a crowd-sourced project known as Terminus2049, were taken away by police in Beijing on 19 April 2020. Their arrest is suspected to be related to their involvement in a project to retroactively archive censored articles relating to COVID-19. With no information about Chen Mei's whereabouts or current condition, there are grave concerns that he is at real risk of torture or other ill-treatment.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Director Wang Xiaohong
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Dear Director Wang:

I am writing to express my concern about human rights defender **Chen Mei (陈玫)**, who was taken away by the police on 19 April 2020. Chen Mei is one of three contributors to Terminus2049 (端点星计划) who were arrested that day. While the families of the two other individuals have received some basic information about their arrest, Chen's family have yet to receive any details about his current status.

It is worrying to learn that Chen Mei seems to have been arrested simply for collecting and archiving public information about COVID-19. As I am sure you are aware, freedom to information is an integral part of the right to freedom of expression as recognized in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

Since the outbreak of the pandemic in China, there have been worrying reports of independent journalists being taken away by the police and harassment of citizens who openly criticized the government's handling of the crisis. If there is one lesson from the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic, it is that arbitrarily limiting access to information and shutting down debate serves no public health purpose and can, on the contrary, have serious consequences for people's ability to protect their health.

With no access to a lawyer, or any information about Chen Mei's whereabouts, I am gravely concerned that he is at risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

I therefore call on you to:

- **Release Chen Mei immediately and unconditionally unless there is sufficient credible and admissible evidence that he has committed an internationally recognized offence and is granted a fair trial in line with international standards;**
- **Pending his release, ensure that Chen Mei has regular, unrestricted access to family and lawyers of his choice and is not subjected to torture and other ill-treatment;**

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Terminus2049 (端点星计划) was set up in January 2018, through the online crowd-sourcing platform GitHub. This project works to archive articles that were removed from mainstream media outlets and social media by state censorship. The project has now archived hundreds of articles, including a lot of recent articles related to COVID-19.

On 19 April 2020, Chen Mei (陈玫), Cai Wei (蔡伟) and Cai's girlfriend, surnamed Tang (唐), were taken away by police in Beijing. Family members of Cai Wei and his girlfriend reportedly received information from police in Beijing's Chaoyang District on 24–25 April. According to the available information, Cai and Tang have both been placed under “residential surveillance in a designated location” (指定居所监视居住) on suspicion of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” (寻衅滋事罪). Based on this information, Amnesty International suspects that Chen Mei has been subjected to similar measures.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in China, numerous articles relating to the virus have been censored, including ones published by mainstream media organizations such as a subsidiary of *Beijing Youth Daily* and *Caijing*. Certain social media posts, sensitive hashtags and demands for free speech have all been quickly deleted or censored.

There have been many reports of independent journalists and activists having been harassed by authorities for sharing information about COVID-19 on social media. These include outspoken lawyer and citizen journalist Chen Qiushi, who reported being harassed by the authorities after posting footage from hospitals in Wuhan, and Wuhan resident Fang Bin, who was briefly taken away by the authorities after posting a video purporting to show corpses of COVID-19 victims.

“Residential surveillance in a designated location” is a measure that, under certain circumstances, enables criminal investigators to hold individuals for up to six months outside the formal detention system in what can amount to a form of secret incommunicado detention. When held without access to legal counsel of their choice, their families or others, suspects placed under this form of “residential surveillance” are at risk of torture and other ill-treatment. This form of detention has been used to curb the activities of human rights defenders, including lawyers, activists and religious practitioners. Activists and human rights defenders continue to be systematically subjected to monitoring, harassment, intimidation, arrest and detention.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English or Chinese

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 19 June 2020

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Chen Mei (He/Him)

And copies to:

His Excellency Mr Liu Xiaoming
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