



**United  
Nations**



UNITED NATIONS  
**HUMAN RIGHTS**  
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

## **UN rights office categorically rejects claims it endangered NGOs**

GENEVA (2 February 2017) – The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights strongly rejects the totally unsupported allegation by the Global Accountability Project (GAP) and the Inner City Press blog that it endangered four Chinese human rights defenders who attended the Human Rights Council in Geneva in March 2013.

The UN Human Rights Office also objects to the totally unsupported attempt by GAP to link the detention and subsequent tragic death in custody of Chinese activist Cao Shunli to the actions of the Office.

We deplore the efforts by organizations such as UN Watch to take the spurious allegations by GAP a step further. UN Watch tweeted: “Top @UNHumanRights official informed #China of dissident planning to testify @UN. She was detained & died in prison.” This is an outright lie and a deliberate defamation.

The UN Human Rights Office has publicly condemned the fact that harassment, intimidation and reprisals against NGO delegates attending the Human Rights Council appear to have been increasing in recent years – by a number of different States. Specific examples are now routinely and publicly referred to by the President of the Human Rights Council.

The facts surrounding the Chinese human rights defenders’ attendance at the Human Rights Council 2013 March session are as follows:

Representatives of the NGO in question attended the February-March 2013 meeting in Geneva – a regular public event that is televised and webcast. All four of them were residents of Europe or the United States and made public their plans to attend the Human Rights Council session, at several points beginning with a press release on 27 December 2012, when the NGO in question announced it would be co-hosting a public side event at the UN headquarters in Geneva during the Human Rights Council meeting. As is apparent on its website, the NGO is extremely open about its presence at many such events – including ones at venues much less secure than the UN premises in Geneva. Dating back at least to 2010, the same delegates have been regularly attending meetings of the Human Rights Council, which occur three times a year.

Chinese authorities, and others, regularly ask the UN Human Rights Office, several days or weeks prior to Human Rights Council meetings, whether particular NGO delegates are attending the forthcoming session. The Office never confirms this information until the accreditation process is formally under way, and until it is sure

that there is no obvious security risk.

Nearer to the start of the sessions, the Office frequently receives an official letter, a *note verbale*, from the Government of China alleging that the NGO in question is a terrorist organization, and listing specific allegations against the individual delegates it knows are coming and requesting they be denied accreditation. At this point, the Office alerts UN Security, which looks into the allegations. Upon UN Security's decision that there is no evidence to back up the allegations, the individuals are given the all-clear to enter the UN premises and attend the events they wish to attend. The individuals in question have never been denied entry by the UN on the basis of such allegations.

Additional precautionary measures triggered by the allegations include a warning by the UN to the concerned individuals that such allegations have been made against them, and specific additional vigilance by UN security to ensure no harm comes to the concerned NGO while they are on UN premises.

The inference that the UN Human Rights Office was in some way linked to the detention and tragic death of Cao Shunli six months later is malicious and defamatory, and is not supported by any evidence. Ms. Shunli, who was resident in China itself, was detained en route to an NGO event in Geneva. Neither Ms. Shunli nor the Chinese authorities approached the UN Human Rights Office about her plans to attend the event and the Office had no knowledge of those plans. There was no communication whatsoever between the Office and the Chinese authorities prior to her detention.

After she was detained, the Office closely followed the matter and drew the attention of the President of the Human Rights Council to Ms. Shunli's case. Subsequently, the President raised her detention directly with the Chinese Ambassador in Geneva as a possible example of reprisal by a State against someone cooperating with the UN or its various human rights mechanisms – a practice which the UN Human Rights Office has frequently and publicly denounced.

GAP and the Inner City Press also refer to a staff member at the UN Human Rights Office in relation to this case, who they assert is a whistle-blower and who they allege suffered reprisals at the hands of the Office. In fact, the staff member has never faced reprisals. The staff member has had her contracts renewed and remains employed by the organization on full pay. She has made allegations against various managers. These have been taken seriously, leading to two separate independent investigations that have been carried out to determine whether or not there is any substance to her allegations. In both instances, the claims made by the staff member were found to be unsubstantiated.

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