

Chinese authorities formally arrest ex-lawyer and Xi Jinping critic, activists say

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Chinese authorities have formally arrested two detained activists, including one who called for President Xi Jinping to step down over COVID-19, relatives and fellow campaigners said Thursday.

Prominent figures **Ding Jiaxi** and **Xu Zhiyong** attended a secret meeting involving lawyers and human rights activists in Fujian province in early December, many of whose attendees have since been detained.

It was the latest development in a pattern of receding civil liberties in the country since Xi took power in 2012, which has seen many lawyers and activists arrested.

Ding Jiaxi and Xu Zhiyong are leading figures in the **New Citizens' Movement**, a civil rights group that has called for constitutional reform and criticised government corruption.

Friends and family of both men say they have not been able to visit or contact them.

Ding Jiaxi

Ding Jiaxi, a Beijing-based disbarred lawyer previously jailed for protesting against official corruption, is accused of *"inciting subversion of state power"*, his wife, Luo Shengchun, told AFP. *"My greatest hope now is that Jiaxi can meet his lawyer, and to see that he is well,"* she said. Luo Shengchun said Ding Jiaxi's sister received a notice of his formal arrest in their hometown in Hubei on Tuesday.

She said she was *"incredibly worried"*, after not hearing from her husband for six months, expressing concern that he might have been tortured.

"It's horrible, it's really miserable," the 51-year-old said over the phone.

Xu Zhiyong

Activists said Xu Zhiyong's family received a call last Saturday from Shandong police informing them of his formal arrest, believed to be on similar charges to Ding.

He had been detained since February after publishing a series of critical blogposts on the Communist Party's response to the coronavirus outbreak, and has called on Xi to resign.

His sister was still waiting for written notice on his specific charges, said Hua Ze, a human rights activist in close contact with Xu's relatives.

"(Xu's sister) asked where he was detained but they did not tell her," she said.

While in a typical trial, lawyers can request to meet the accused, Hua noted there have been cases where this had been denied.

Leo Lan of the Chinese Human Rights Defenders watchdog told AFP: *"They should never have been detained in the first place as meeting friends to discuss issues shouldn't be taken as 'endangering national security' and 'inciting subversion'."*

P.S.

<https://hongkongfp.com/2020/06/25/chinese-authorities-formally-arrest-ex-lawyer-and-xi-jinping-critic-activists-say/>