



U.N. Committee Blasts Activist's Jailing

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WASHINGTON (AP) - A United Nations committee has ruled that Boston-area scholar Yang Jianli has been held by the Chinese government in violation of international law for more than a year.

In an opinion made public Wednesday, the U.N. Human Rights Commission working group found that Chinese authorities failed to give Yang a fair trial or access to a lawyer, and the panel asked the Chinese to "take the necessary steps to remedy the situation." While the U.N. has no power to enforce the judgment, Yang's family and supporters are hoping it will bring added political and public pressure on the People's Republic of China to release the 39-year-old democracy activist.

"Today it is clearer than ever that the Chinese government must immediately release Yang Jianli," said Jared Genser, president of Freedom Now and the lawyer who filed the U.N. petition on behalf of Yang's wife, Christina Fu.

"It is absolutely astonishing that the Chinese government has blatantly disregarded Yang Jianli's human rights, and has held him for more than a year without allowing him access to his family, his lawyer or anyone in the outside world."

Yang, a mathematician and economist who lives in Brookline, Mass., is the founder and head of the Boston-based Foundation for China in the 21st Century. A Chinese citizen with permanent U.S. residency, Yang was taken into custody April 26, 2002, when he tried to board a plane at the Kunming Airport with false papers. He had been traveling around China meeting with democracy advocates, laid-off workers and others. Yang called his wife briefly from a hotel where he was being detained, but no one has heard from him since. Chinese authorities have refused to allow his family or his lawyer to see or speak to him. In response to the U.N. petition, the Chinese government argued that Yang was taken into custody because he was suspected of "illegally crossing the state frontier" and "might also have committed other offenses."

In what is the first extensive Chinese response to the matter, the government told the working group that security authorities acted "in strict accordance with due legal process" and that the actions against Yang did "not constitute instances of arbitrary detention."

After reviewing the case, the five-member working group, which is made up of independent experts from France, Algeria, Paraguay, Hungary and Iran, determined that China failed to file formal charges, failed to formally acknowledge Yang's arrest, failed to give him access to a lawyer, and failed to release him after 37 days, which is required if no warrant is filed.

In the last five years, the group has formally considered 20 petitions against China, and ruled against that country in each case. It is not known how many of those detainees are still in custody.

Members of Congress, including Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass., have continued to pressure Chinese and U.S. officials about the case. Frank and other Massachusetts lawmakers wrote to General Secretary Hu Jintao earlier this year asking for Yang to be freed. And national security adviser Condoleezza Rice told Fu that American officials have pressed "high-level" Chinese authorities on the matter. Lawmakers are gathering support for a House resolution calling for Yang's release.