



Joint Statement:

Chinese lawyer Zhang Wenpeng reportedly tortured while in detention

30 October 2025

The Law Society of England and Wales, Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada, Lawyers for Lawyers, International Bar Association Human Rights Institute, Asian Lawyers Network, The Rights Practice, and the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE) are gravely concerned about reports that Zhang Wenpeng has been tortured while in arbitrary detention in China, as well as the infringement of his fair trial rights, and the politically-motivated denial of his licence to practise law.

Zhang Wenpeng passed the Chinese bar exam in 2016 but has reportedly been denied a licence to practice law due to his opposition to the government-controlled All China Lawyers Association (ACLA). As a result, he worked as a legal intern and has been outspoken about his human rights and corruption concerns with the Chinese authorities.

Zhang Wenpeng was arrested on 24 September 2024, on the charge of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble", after he provided legal information to a client accused of corruption. He was formally indicted on 14 July 2025 and is currently being held at the Sanya No.2 Detention Centre in Hainan Province. While in detention, he was reportedly shackled with heavy chains for seven consecutive days and nights in December 2024. His reports of this abuse have been ignored or inadequately addressed by the prison staff and authorities. In February 2025, officials denied his lawyer access to his case files and monitored their meetings, violating the principle of lawyer-client confidentiality and undermining his right to a fair trial.

Zhang Wenpeng was detained for the first time in 2022 for accusing the director of the Qingdao Justice Bureau of corruption, due to the Bureau's part in preventing him from getting his licence to practise law. He has also co-signed a 2023 petition to the National People's Congress calling for the abolition of the "picking quarrels and provoking trouble" offence – the very charge that he now faces.

Our organisations are concerned that Zhang Wenpeng's detention is arbitrary, as it is related to his professional duties and the legitimate exercise of his freedom of expression. We are also concerned about Zhang Wenpeng's reports of the torture he has endured in detention, and the infringements of his fair trial rights.

Zhang Wenpeng's case raises serious concerns under international human rights law. The right not to be subjected to torture or ill-treatment is absolute and as party to the UN Convention Against Torture China is obligated to prohibit, prevent and investigate

allegations of torture. The rights not to be subjected to arbitrary detention and to a fair trial are established principles under international law, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Articles 9 & 10) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Articles 9(1) & 14). They are also recognised as fundamental rights under customary international law. Furthermore, UN experts have repeatedly [criticised](#) the use of vague charges, such as “picking quarrels and provoking trouble”, to target individuals exercising their rights to free expression and legal or human rights advocacy.

According to Article 10 of the [UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers](#), “governments, professional associations of lawyers and educational institutions shall ensure that there is no discrimination against a person with respect to entry into or continued practice within the legal profession on the grounds of race, colour, sex, ethnic origin, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, economic or other status”. Furthermore, Article 16 provides that governments should “ensure that lawyers (a) are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference; (...) and (c) shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognised professional duties, standards and ethics”. Moreover, Article 23 of the Basic Principles provides that: “Lawyers like other citizens are entitled to freedom of expression, belief, association, and assembly. In particular, they shall have the right to take part in public discussion of matters concerning the administration of justice and the promotion and protection of human rights.” These principles are also reflected in the newly adopted Council of Europe [Convention on the Protection of the Profession of Lawyer](#) which will be open for accession by States worldwide once into force.

Zhang Wenpeng’s right to freedom of expression is also protected under Article 35 of China’s constitution, Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. As a signatory to the ICCPR, China is obligated under international law to refrain from acts that would defeat the object and purpose of the treaty.

In light of the above, our organisations urgently call on China’s authorities to:

- Immediately ensure the unconditional release of Zhang Wenpeng from detention, drop the criminal charges, and reverse all administrative measures against him in relation to his legitimate professional activities and the exercise of his freedom of expression.
- Immediately halt all acts against Zhang Wenpeng constituting torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and ensure he receives prompt medical treatment and comprehensive rehabilitation to address the physical and psychological effects of the torture he has endured.
- Urgently initiate an independent, impartial investigation into the allegations of torture and ill-treatment of Zhang Wenpeng, ensuring accountability and compliance with international standards.
- Ensure that Zhang Wenpeng has access to an effective remedy and timely access to independent legal counsel of his choice, in line with international human rights standards.
- Cease all acts of harassment, intimidation, and arbitrary detention against lawyers in China.

- Uphold the rights of all lawyers to carry out their professional functions without interference and to exercise their rights to freedom of expression, association, and movement.

Signatories:

Law Society of England and Wales

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada (LRWC)

Lawyers for Lawyers

International Bar Association Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)

Asian Lawyers Network (ALN)

The Rights Practice

Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE)