
Chinese Government Denies Travel to Bangkok for AIDS Activist

Bangkok, 20 November, 2013

Yuan Wenli, a women's rights and AIDS activist from China, was forced to cancel her plan to travel to Bangkok for this week's International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (ICAAP), due to the Chinese government's cancellation of her passport, Asia Catalyst said today.

Mrs Yuan Wenli, a prominent AIDS activist from Zheng Zhou, Henan province, was stopped by customs officials at Guangzhou airport on November 15, 2013 and informed that her passport had been revoked by the local authorities. She was specifically told that she was not to go to Bangkok for ICAAP.

Yuan Wenli was due to participate at this year's ICAAP where thousands of AIDS activists from across Asia are gathering in Bangkok this week. The Congress brings together policy makers, civil society, academics and relevant regional stakeholders to share information and discuss strategies to control the epidemic. Asia Catalyst had organised for Yuan Wenli to participate in a panel discussion and meeting with UN agencies and international organizations in Bangkok to share her experiences around documenting medical discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS in China.

"This is a great opportunity for me to meet with organizations from other countries, to learn their experiences and to show what we have achieved in China," said Yuan Wenli. "But now I can do nothing but stay at home."

Yuan Wenli's case highlights ongoing restrictions on freedom of association and assembly for AIDS activists in China. Rights activists operate in a difficult and oppressive environment. Henan province, the home of Wenli, was the main site of China's blood disaster in the 1990s, in which the HIV virus was transmitted to hundreds of thousands of citizens through unsafe blood transfusions and blood donations. Decades later activists continue to advocate for accountability and compensation for the victims, in an environment rife with police surveillance, arbitrary detention, arrest and harassment. It is difficult for activists to organize events and many meetings have been canceled by the authorities.

China's Prime Minister Li Keqiang has stressed that "civil society organizations play an important role in the response to HIV/AIDS."

"The cancellation of Yuan Wenli's passport undermines efforts to strengthen community voices and build the leadership of civil society organizations, which is essential to an effective response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in China," said Tingting Shen, Advocacy Director for Asia Catalyst. "We urge China to protect the right of expression and association for its citizens and to ensure a space for civil society leaders to have their voices heard."

As the mother of an HIV positive child, Yuan Wenli founded Golden Sunshine in 2005, an organization that provides support to women and children living with HIV/AIDS. In 2010, she established the Henan Regional Network of Women Living with HIV/AIDS, the first regional

network in China that builds the leadership of women in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Due to her leadership and commitment to women's rights she was elected secretary of the Women's Network Against AIDS China (WNAC) in 2012.

Asia Catalyst works with grassroots groups from marginalized communities in East and Southeast Asia that promote the right to health.

For further information on Yuan Wenli's case, please see:

Why Deprive Me of My Right to Participation? Zhengzhou police revoked passport to prevent AIDS activist from participating in regional AIDS Congress. (Chinese and English: <http://goo.gl/y44NUi>)

CONTACT:

Shen Tingting, Asia Catalyst Advocacy Director (Chinese & English)

+66 - 92 810 8615 (until 22 November)

+86 -138 117 10833 (after 22 November)

tshen@asiacatalyst.org