

10-Year-Old Girl Detained, Denied Food and Water in China

Feb. 27 began like any other school day for 10-year-old Zhang Anni. Little did she know that on this day she would be ordered to the principal's office, whisked away by four unidentified men and detained without food or water—or the knowledge of where her father was—for 20 hours.

Anni's crime? Her father, activist Zhang Lin, had exposed government corruption.

I had the rare privilege of speaking directly with Anni and her father on a national Internet radio program broadcast throughout China Saturday evening. Their story filled me with indignation. Anni has not been allowed to return to school.

No legitimate government would detain, starve and deny education to a 10-year-old.

According to Anni's father, their case has sparked national outrage in China. Five hundred people have dropped their jobs and traveled to demonstrate outside Anni's former school, the Hupo Elementary School in Heifei. Some protesters are hunger striking. Zhang says he is deeply touched by the love and sacrifice of these supporters.

Those demonstrating show not only love for Zhang and Anni, but also the awakening of an increasingly bold contempt for the Chinese Communist Party's brutal persecution of the children of dissidents. Such persecution is routine in China. Blind activist Chen Guangcheng's son had to move away from his parents in order to go to school. Guangcheng's daughter was only allowed to go to school after the application of intense domestic and international pressure. Now the Chinese Communist

Party has detained and tortured Guangcheng's nephew, Chen Kegui.

I believe the Chinese Communist Party persecutes, detains and tortures the families of dissidents in an attempt to silence them. The party commits serious human rights violations against children to stifle freedom of speech. This is state-sponsored child abuse.

Activist Zhang Lin participated in the 1989 democracy protests in Anhui Province. A prolific dissident writer, he has been jailed multiple times and subjected to continuous monitoring, according to a Human Rights in China report.

Meanwhile, Anni was fearless and articulate when speaking with me on national radio. Her father commented, "Anni is strong. She's been dealing with the police since she was two years old. She knows how to handle them."

What an extraordinary girl. It was an honor to speak with her. I told her, "Be brave, be true, be humble, and one day you will help lead your people to freedom."

With 1.3 billion people living in China—one-fifth of the population on earth—the world will not be free until the people of China are free.

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