

UN rights office categorically rejects claims it endangered NGOs

Wrong. GAP stands for Government Accountability Project

GENEVA (2 February 2017) – The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights strongly rejects the totally unsupported allegation by the Global Accountability Project (GAP) and the Inner City Press blog that it endangered four Chinese human rights defenders who attended the Human Rights Council in Geneva in March 2013.

This is simply untrue. GAP cited Ms Cao's case as supporting evidence of why this policy is dangerous.

No investigation had been conducted. OHCHR had no basis for this statement.

The UN Human Rights Office also objects to the totally unsupported attempt by GAP to link the detention and subsequent tragic death in custody of Chinese activist Cao Shunli to the actions of the Office.

We deplore the efforts by organizations such as UN Watch to take the spurious allegations by GAP a step further. UN Watch tweeted: "Top @UNHumanRights official informed #China of dissident planning to testify @UN. She was detained & died in prison." This is an outright lie and a deliberate defamation.

The UN Human Rights Office has publicly condemned the fact that harassment, intimidation and reprisals against NGO delegates attending the Human Rights Council appear to have been increasing in recent years – by a number of different States. Specific examples are now routinely and publicly referred to by the President of the Human Rights Council.

Many people attend side events, but do not take the floor in the main meeting.

See emails - OHCHR did not check where they lived before handing over their names.

The facts surrounding the Chinese human rights defenders' attendance at the Human Rights Council 2013 March session are as follows:

Representatives of the NGO in question attended the February-March 2013 meeting in Geneva – a regular public event that is televised and webcast. All four of them were residents of Europe or the United States and made public their plans to attend the Human Rights Council session, at several points beginning with a press release on 27 December 2012, when the NGO in question announced it would be co-hosting a public side event at the UN headquarters in Geneva during the Human Rights Council meeting. As is apparent on its website, the NGO is extremely open about its presence at many such events – including ones at venues much less secure than the UN premises in Geneva. Dating back at least to 2010, the same delegates have been regularly attending meetings of the Human Rights Council, which occur three times a year.

The cited press release named nobody. See witness statement of Dolkun Isa.

The Chinese authorities targeted their families still in China. Security of UN premises is irrelevant.

The admission it continues, in the present tense - China asks, the Office "confirms" (provides), China sends a note about individuals it "knows are coming" (because OHCHR told them).

Chinese authorities, and others, regularly ask the UN Human Rights Office, several days or weeks prior to Human Rights Council meetings, whether particular NGO delegates are attending the forthcoming session. The Office never confirms this information until the accreditation process is formally under way, and until it is sure that there is no obvious security risk.

Nearer to the start of the sessions, the Office frequently receives an official letter, a *note verbale*, from the Government of China alleging that the NGO in question is a terrorist organization, and listing specific allegations against the individual delegates it knows are coming and requesting they be denied accreditation. At this point, the

This is designed to confuse - all it means is the Office does not tell China who is coming until the people ask to come.

This is the actual security check - are Chinese delegates safe from the human rights advocates?

Office alerts UN Security, which looks into the allegations. Upon UN Security's decision that there is no evidence to back up the allegations, the individuals are given the all-clear to enter the UN premises and attend the events they wish to attend. The individuals in question have never been denied entry by the UN on the basis of such allegations.

False - the NGO was informed post-facto a total of three times in 15 years. Not the individuals.

Additional precautionary measures triggered by the allegations include a warning by the UN to the concerned individuals that such allegations have been made against them, and specific additional vigilance by UN security to ensure no harm comes to the concerned NGO while they are on UN premises.

The inference that the UN Human Rights Office was in some way linked to the detention and tragic death of Cao Shunli six months later is malicious and defamatory, and is not supported by any evidence. Ms. Shunli, who was resident in China itself, was detained en route to an NGO event in Geneva. Neither Ms. Shunli nor the Chinese authorities approached the UN Human Rights Office about her plans to attend the event and the Office had no knowledge of those plans. There was no communication whatsoever between the Office and the Chinese authorities prior to her detention.

After she was detained, the Office closely followed the matter and drew the attention of the President of the Human Rights Council to Ms. Shunli's case. Subsequently, the President raised her detention directly with the Chinese Ambassador in Geneva as a possible example of reprisal by a State against someone cooperating with the UN or its various human rights mechanisms – a practice which the UN Human Rights Office has frequently and publicly denounced.

GAP and the Inner City Press also refer to a staff member at the UN Human Rights Office in relation to this case, who they assert is a whistle-blower and who they allege suffered reprisals at the hands of the Office. In fact, the staff member has never faced reprisals. The staff member has had her contracts renewed and remains employed by the organization on full pay. She has made allegations against various managers. These have been taken seriously, leading to two separate independent investigations that have been carried out to determine whether or not there is any substance to her allegations. In both instances, the claims made by the staff member were found to be unsubstantiated.

ENDS

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Her name was Ms Cao, not Ms Shunli. And she did in fact inform the person who drafted the UPR report on China about her intention to attend.

Defamation.

Neither investigation concerned the policy of handing names to China, the final paragraph is included to try to discredit me and give the impression I am in the habit of making false allegations to discourage reporting. Check the language of the press release - OHCHR musters more anger against me than any dictator.

One investigation was into the Chief of the Human Rights Council Branch taking money from the Moroccan ambassador to pay for his private book launch, the other was into managers retaliating against me by making false statements in my performance evaluation when I reported corrupt recruitment.

Both were found to be substantiated. The UN just declined to take any action against the managers.

The UN continues to refuse to investigate the policy of handing names to China.