

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health

Ref.: AL CHN 6/2026

(Please use this reference in your reply)

29 June 2026

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 61/22 and 60/10.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning the continued denial of medical care to the mother of human rights defender Yang Li.

Yang Li is a land rights defender from Jintan District, Changzhou City, Jiangsu Province. Since 2009, she has been advocating against allegedly unlawful land requisition and crop clearance carried out by the district authorities.

The situation of Yang Li and her family members was the subject of a previous communication sent to you Excellency's Government on 29 January 2026 (CHN 1/2026). We regret that to date, no response has been received to that communication.

According to the information received:

On 10 February 2026, the mother of Yang Li, Xu Dongqing, was reportedly denied medical care at Peking University First Hospital. She suffers from [REDACTED] among others. After attempting to access medical care for 20 days, on 3 March 2026 they were forcibly taken back to Jiangsu by plainclothes police officers from Jintan.

On 31 March 2026, the father of Yang Li was allegedly arbitrarily detained, and her mother collapsed and fell ill. The Jintan People's Hospital reportedly diagnosed her condition as minor cerebral hemorrhage and refused her transfer. Subsequently, she was transferred to Huashan Hospital in Shanghai. On 1 April 2026, the Huashan Hospital diagnosed Yang Li's mother with [REDACTED]

During this period, several public officials and police officers have threatened the family members of Yang Li several times and expressed their wish that they would die.

In mid-April 2026, Yang Li was forced to undergo dialysis at the Jintan District People's Hospital and reportedly was not provided with the adequate medical treatment. On 21 May 2026, when she demanded [REDACTED] and medication from

medical staff, this was reportedly restricted for about 10 days, including examinations and treatment.

Ms. Xu Dongqing passed away on 25 May 2026.

On 24 June 2026, Yang Li went to the Jintan District Government, hoping to secure a meeting with the District Party Secretary. However, they were reportedly arrested by police.

Without wishing to prejudge the accuracy of the above-mentioned allegations, we wish to express our serious concerns about the alleged continued denial of access to adequate medical care to the mother of Yang Li, apparently in relation to her daughter's continued advocacy work as a land rights defender.

Denial of medical treatment to imprisoned human rights defenders and their family members is an issue that has been raised with your Excellency's Government by a number of special procedures mandate holders, contributing to a demonstrable pattern (CHN 21/2025, CHN 16/2024, CHN 11/2023, CHN 12/2021, CHN 4/2021, CHN 17/2019).

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Annex on Reference to international human rights law** attached to this letter which cites international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and/or comment(s) you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.
2. Please provide information regarding the reasons as to why the access to adequate medical care was denied to the mother of the human rights defender Yang Li.
3. Please indicate the measures undertaken by your Excellency's Government to ensure that human rights defenders are able to carry out their legitimate work in a safe and enabling environment, without the fear of prosecution, harassment and violence, and without discrimination, in full respect of their human rights.

This communication, and any response received from your Excellency's Government, will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) at the 60 days mark. Should Your Excellency's Government respond within 60 days, both the communication and the response, may be published before the 60 days mark. The communications and responses will also be made available in the subsequent periodic report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged denial of access to health services for Yang Li and prevent their re-

occurrence and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person(s) responsible for the alleged violations.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Andrea Bolaños Vargas

Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

Tlaleng Mofokeng

Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health

Annex

Reference to international human rights law

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, we would like to refer your Excellency's Government to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which China signed on 5 October 1998, and in particular to article 19, which guarantee the right to freedom of opinion and expression. As established by the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (VCLT), where the signature to a treaty is not subject to ratification, acceptance or approval, the signature does not establish the consent to be bound. However, it is a means of authentication and expresses the willingness of the signatory State to continue the treaty-making process. The signature qualifies the signatory state to proceed to ratification, acceptance or approval. It also creates an obligation to refrain, in good faith, from acts that would defeat the object and the purpose of the treaty (VCLT, articles 10 and 18).

Article 19 of the ICCPR guarantees the right to freedom of opinion and the right to freedom of expression, which includes the right "to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media". This right applies online as well as offline and includes not only the exchange of information that is favourable, but also that which may criticize, shock, or offend. In its [general comment No. 34](#), the Human Rights Committee stated that States parties to the ICCPR are required to guarantee the right to freedom of expression, including "political discourse, commentary on one's own and on public affairs, canvassing, discussion of human rights, journalism, cultural and artistic expression, teaching, and religious discourse" (CCPR/C/GC/34, para. 11).

The Committee further asserts that there is a duty of States to put in place effective measures to protect against attacks aimed at silencing those exercising their right to freedom of expression (para. 23). Recognizing how journalists and persons who engage in the gathering and analysis of information on the human rights situation and who publish human rights-related reports, including judges and lawyers, are frequently subjected to threats, intimidation and attacks because of their activities, the Committee stresses that "all such attacks should be vigorously investigated in a timely fashion, and the perpetrators prosecuted, and the victims, or, in the case of killings, their representatives, be in receipt of appropriate forms of redress" (para. 23).

Any restriction on the right to freedom of expression must be compatible with the requirements set out in article 19(3) ICCPR. Under these requirements, restrictions must (i) be provided by law; (ii) pursue one of the legitimate aims for restriction, which are the respect of the rights or reputations of others and the protection of national security or of public order (*ordre public*), or of public health or morals; and (iii) be necessary and proportionate for those objectives. The State has the burden of proof to demonstrate that any such restrictions are compatible with the Covenant, and restrictions must always be "the least intrusive instrument among those which might achieve their protective function" ([CCPR/C/GC/34](#), para. 34).

We also wish to refer your Excellency's Government to article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), ratified by China on 27 Mar 2001, which establishes that States have an obligation to guarantee

the right to the highest standard of physical and mental health. In line with general comment No. 14 para. 34 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), this is attained, inter alia, by refraining from denying or limiting equal access for all persons, including prisoners or detainees to preventive, curative and palliative health services. The general comment further underlines that the “health is a fundamental human right indispensable for the exercise of other human rights” (para. 1) and that the right to health contains both freedoms and entitlements, including the right to be free from torture as well as “the right to a system of health protection which provides equality of opportunity for people to enjoy the highest attainable level of health” (para. 8).

We would like to draw the attention of your Excellency’s Government to the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, otherwise known as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, which was adopted by consensus at the UN General Assembly in 1998. In particular, we would like to highlight articles 1 and 2 of the Declaration, which state that everyone, individually and in association with others, has the right to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms and that each State has a prime responsibility and duty to promote, protect and implement all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Furthermore, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency’s Government the following provisions of the Declaration:

- article 6(b) and (c), which reiterates the right to freely publish, impart or disseminate information and knowledge on all human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to study, discuss and hold opinions on the observance of these rights;
- article 9 (2) which provides that everyone whose rights or freedoms are allegedly violated has the right, either in person or through legally authorized representation, to complain to and have that complaint promptly reviewed in a public hearing before an independent, impartial and competent judicial or other authority established by law and to obtain from such an authority a decision, in accordance with law, providing redress, including any compensation due, where there has been a violation of that person’s rights or freedoms, as well as enforcement of the eventual decision and award, all without undue delay.
- article 12(2) and (3), which provides that the State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of everyone against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the Declaration.