



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on October 28, 2014

Report Exposes China's Abusive "Black Jails"

A Chinese civil rights monitoring group has issued a report documenting the existence in Communist China of "black jails," off-the-radar detention centers where potentially thousands of individuals — 80 percent women — who have raised the ire of local officials are imprisoned without trial, facing violence, abuse, and even death at the hands of the thugs running the unofficial facilities.



Entitled ["We Can Beat You to Death With Impunity": Secret Detention & Abuse of Women in China's "Black Jails."](#) the report by the group Chinese Human Rights Defender (CHRD) documents the cases of at least one thousand women imprisoned in the "black jails" that have largely replaced the recently outlawed "re-education through labor" camps formerly used by police and regional government officials to lock away without trial those considered troublemakers.

"Inside these shadowy detention cells," the group said in a press release announcing the report, "the predominantly female detainees — including elderly women, migrant women, women who lost land or were victimized by forced eviction, women with disabilities, and mothers with young children — are subjected to appalling abuses, from physical and sexual assaults to deprivation of medical treatment."

CHRD International Director Renee Xia said the detention centers are referred to as "black jails" because "they're illegal, often in secret locations, they're covered up by the government, and their victims are silenced. The fact that these sprawling facilities disproportionately affect women testifies to the widespread state-sponsored violence against women."

Xia said that the Chinese government has steadfastly denied the existence of the jails "because it wants to use them to 'maintain stability' without getting the bad publicity. The very existence of black jails contradicts a favorite mantra of Chinese leaders, that 'China is a country ruled by law.'"

The report relates the personal stories of several Chinese women who have been abducted and imprisoned in "black jails," documenting the abuse they have suffered, while their male abusers have gone unpunished.

One victim whose story is documented in the report recalled that "in the black jail, the door was locked 24 hours a day," while the male "thugs" were permitted "do anything they wanted [to detainees] — bully, torture, humiliate, and abuse them. Some petitioners suffered back injuries while others were pulled into bathrooms, stripped naked, and doused with cold water. Thugs brazenly kicked female petitioners in the stomach."



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Included in the many examples of abuse happening in the jails is that of Wang Gongying, a woman in her 60s who was dragged out of bed in the night by officials from her communities family planning commission, and taken to a holding cell after she persisted in complaining to high-level government authorities about efforts to force her daughter to undergo sterilization.

“Essentially, they were holding Wang hostage in order to force her daughter to come out of hiding,” the report said. “Ms. Wang, already struggling with heart problems and high blood pressure, was beaten and horribly mistreated. She shook from the freezing cold, fell sick, and had severe back pains. Only after three days was Wang allowed to call her family, who contacted the police. But the police refused to get involved because the matter implicated the family planning bureau.”

Detainees can be held for months or even years in the secret prisons, with the longest example of a documented detention being a mother and daughter, Li Zhiyan and her older daughter Zhang Zijuan, who have been “illegally held for nearly six years in Baoding City,” the report relates. “Seized in November 2008 after Li’s husband was killed in a dispute with local cadres, the two have been held in government offices, a firefighting unit, a courtyard in a rural area, and a nursing home.” The report adds that Li’s youngest daughter has also been threatened by a local official with imprisonment for her continued attempts to secure the release of her mother and sister.

“Perhaps most galling,” says the report, is that “no government officials are known to have been investigated or criminally prosecuted for their involvement in operating the facilities, and many of them have also been perpetrators of violent abuses and threats.”

The report notes that “if victimized in a black jail, Chinese citizens are blocked from receptive avenues of justice, and courts rarely accept lawsuits that victims try to file or hear a case of black jail detention and abuse. Many victims persist in bringing cases against authorities through the petitioning process, even though they face more abuse, including further detention in black jails, as a consequence for seeking redress.”

The report documents that nearly 20,000 grievances of various kinds are filed against local government offices each day across China, mostly by middle-aged or elderly women who have little or no income, and little defense against reprisal. Radio Free Asia, which has reported on the black jails, noted that “those who do pursue complaints against the government — often for forced evictions, loss of farmland, accidents, or death and mistreatment in custody — say they are repeatedly stonewalled, detained in black jails, and beaten or harassed by the authorities.”

CHRD has published the report in an effort to compel governments and international groups to pressure China’s government in Beijing to officially acknowledge the black jails, to put an end to all undocumented and illegal detentions of women, set free all detainees presently being held, and bring to justice those who have been responsible for the abuse and imprisonment.

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