

29 January 2021

## China: Human rights defender Guo Feixiong barred from leaving country to see ailing wife

On the evening of 28 January 2021, border control authorities at Shanghai’s Pudong Airport blocked human rights defender and writer **Yang Maodong** (杨茂东), better known by his pen name **Guo Feixiong** (郭飞雄), from boarding a flight to the United States to care for his wife **Zhang Qing** who is seriously ill. The authorities reportedly cited “suspicion of endangering national security” as the basis for imposing an exit ban on the defender.

[Guo Feixiong](#) is a well known figure in China's rights defence movement and laureate of the [2015 Front Line Defenders Award](#). He has previously spent 11 years in prison for his human rights activities. His first imprisonment from 2006 and 2011 came after he provided legal assistance and organisational support to residents in Taishi village in Guangdong province who were seeking to remove their village chief whom they accused of corruption, as well as after the publication of a book exposing a political scandal in the northeastern province of Liaoning.

His second [imprisonment](#) from 2013 to 2019 came after he participated in a peaceful protest in Guangzhou opposing censorship of a local newspaper which challenged government censorship. He was subjected to torture and [degrading treatment](#) while in detention. After he was released in August 2019, he has continued to author [articles and commentaries](#) on issues concerning human rights, democratic governance, and constitutional reforms in China and other countries.

In early January 2021, the human rights defenders wife Zhang Qing underwent a major surgery in the United States for colon cancer metastasised to the liver and is scheduled to begin chemotherapy for the next six months. On 27 January 2021, Guo Feixiong issued a [statement](#) indicating that, on 26 January 2021, two state security officers from the Public Security Bureau in Guangzhou city visited him and informed him that while provincial and municipal police officials agreed to his departure, the Ministry of Public Security has objected and ordered local authorities to block him at the airport, unless he goes to a “special location” in Hubei province, about 1,000 kilometres north of Guangdong, to meet with unknown officials from the Ministry to “reach an agreement”. Guo Feixiong refused as he wishes to immediately travel to the United States due to his wife’s critical health condition. He indicated in the statement that he would immediately go on an indefinite hunger strike if the authorities prevent him from travelling to the United States.

On 27 January 2021, Guo Feixiong went ahead and purchased tickets for flights to the US that were scheduled to depart the following day. On 28 January 2021, he was able to fly from Guangzhou to Shanghai, but was stopped at the immigration counter at Shanghai’s Pudong Airport, where his connecting flight to the US was to depart that evening. His friends last heard from him around 10:00pm local time on 28 January 2021. Calls to his mobiles have since gone unanswered. His current whereabouts and condition are unknown.

The Chinese government has a record of preventing human rights defenders who are overseas from returning to China or denying detained defenders the right to visit dying or gravely ill family members or to attend their funeral. Front Line Defenders strongly condemns the arbitrary exit ban imposed on Guo Feixiong and believes it is a reprisal for his legitimate and peaceful human rights work.

**Front Line Defenders urges the relevant authorities in China to:**

1. Immediately and unconditionally allow and facilitate Guo Feixiong's departure from China for the United States, and cease and refrain from any forms of restrictions on his personal liberty and freedom of movement pending his departure;
2. Ensure that after his departure, he is allowed to return to China whenever he so chooses;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in China are able to carry out their human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, in line with China's international human rights obligations and commitments.

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