**Chinese Human Rights Defenders (CHRD)’s Submission to**

**Joint questionnaire by Special Procedure mandate holders on**

**Protecting human rights during and after the COVID-19**

Date of Submission: 10 June 2020

Human rights [violations](https://www.nchrd.org/2020/01/china-protect-human-rights-while-combatting-coronavirus-outbreak/) surged in China since the Chinese government began implementing draconian measures in response to COVID-19. These include deleting critical information online, censoring the media, punishing whistleblowing doctors, detaining and disappearing independent journalists and government critics, and [kicking out](https://www.cjr.org/analysis/chinese-nationals-forced-resignations.php) [foreign reporters](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1757162.shtml). There have been reports of discrimination against Hubei residents and African migrants in the context of the pandemic.

Under the guise of fighting the novel coronavirus, authorities in China have escalated suppression online by blocking independent reporting, information sharing, and critical comments on government responses. Aggressive cyber policing and invasive online surveillance have played a key role in the initial government cover-up of the outbreak and hampering vital information flow, contributing to significant delay of emergency responses and loss of life.

1. **Arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance of human rights defenders**

The Chinese government’s response to the COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak has included arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance of citizen journalists and human rights defenders, police intimidation against civil society, and indiscriminate censorship and restrictions on media reporting. In some cases, the detention and forced disappearance were carried out under the [disguise](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/15/xi-critic-professor-this-may-be-last-piece-i-write-words-ring-true) of “mandatory quarantine.”

(*In chronological order*)

* One of the early actions taken by Chinese authorities in response to the coronavirus outbreak was to silence several whistleblowing Wuhan doctors. On December 30, the Wuhan Health Commission [confirmed](http://www.bjnews.com.cn/news/2019/12/31/668430.html) an unknown virus and sent a [directive](https://www.nchrd.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/%E5%85%B3%E4%BA%8E%E5%81%9A%E5%A5%BD%E4%B8%8D%E6%98%8E%E5%8E%9F%E5%9B%A0%E8%82%BA%E7%82%8E%E6%95%91%E6%B2%BB%E5%B7%A5%E4%BD%9C%E7%9A%84%E7%B4%A7%E6%80%A5%E9%80%9A%E7%9F%A5.pdf) prohibiting doctors and nurses from disclosing any information about the outbreak to the public. Dr Ai Fen (艾芬) and Dr Li Wenliang (李文亮), from Wuhan Central Hospital, were among the first medical professionals trying to share information and sound the alarm about the new coronavirus. Authorities summoned them for questioning, and sternly warned them to keep quiet. Police punished Dr Li and eight other medical workers with “reprimands.” Dr Li Wenliang’s “[reprimand](https://chinadigitaltimes.net/chinese/2020/01/%e5%8c%97%e9%9d%92%e6%b7%b1%e4%b8%80%e5%ba%a6%ef%bd%9c%e5%8f%97%e8%ae%ad%e8%af%ab%e7%9a%84%e6%ad%a6%e6%b1%89%e5%8c%bb%e7%94%9f%ef%bc%9a11%e5%a4%a9%e5%90%8e%e8%a2%ab%e7%97%85%e4%ba%ba%e4%bc%a0%e6%9f%93/)” was dated January 3. On February 6, Dr Li died after contracting COVID-19.
* Dissident intellectual and former prisoner of conscience, [Guo Quan (郭泉)](https://wqw2010.blogspot.com/2020/02/blog-post_16.html), was detained on charges of “inciting subversion of state power” on January 31 and then [formally arrested](https://wqw2010.blogspot.com/2020/02/blog-post_16.html) in February for speaking out online about the coronavirus outbreak. He is being held at Nanjing No. 2 Detention Center.
* Citizen journalist and lawyer Chen Qiushi (陈秋实) has been missing since being taken away by police on February 6. Chen, original from Heilongjiang, is a lawyer who practiced law in Beijing and became popular online after he started social media broadcasting from the Hong Kong protests in 2019. Just after the Hubei authorities announced the mandatory lockdown in Wuhan on January 23, Chen travelled to the city to report the situation on the frontline.
* Citizen journalist and rights activist, Fang Bin (方斌), has been missing since being taken away by police on February 9. Fang Bin is a Wuhan resident who began posting videos online of life and death in the epicentre of the outbreak, including [one video filmed on January 25](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgMzy-5f-qw) that highlighted the overwhelmed hospitals, in which he called for unblocked, free information to combat the epidemic.
* Legal scholar and activist [Xu Zhiyong (许志永)](https://www.nchrd.org/2013/10/prisoner-of-conscience-xu-zhiyong/) has been disappeared since February 15, later confirmed to be under “residential surveillance at a designated location” (RSDL), on charges of “inciting subversion of state power.” Xu attended a meeting in Xiamen in December and in hiding from police search, he wrote and posted online essays, one of which [heavily criticised](https://www.chinafile.com/reporting-opinion/viewpoint/dear-chairman-xi-its-time-you-go) Xi Jinping’s response to the outbreak.
* Citizen journalist and former CCTV host [Li Zehua (李泽华)](https://wqw2010.blogspot.com/2020/02/90cctv7.html) was [disappeared](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/22/missing-wuhan-citizen-journalist-reappears-after-two-months) into forced quarantine after police took him into custody on February 26. He reappeared in a public video on April 22 and said he had been released on March 28. Li had travelled to Wuhan in February, after Chen Qiushi’s disappearance, and began to report on conditions on the ground and post [videos online](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJHUpBCNKrZwBhxfcIrP8Aw).
* Beijing police [formally arrested](https://www.nchrd.org/2020/04/retired-professor-arrested-for-calling-covid19-ccp-virus/) retired professor Chen Zhaozhi (陈兆志) on April 14 for “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” over his online speech about the COVID-19 pandemic online, including reportedly writing “Wuhan pneumonia is not a Chinese virus but Chinese Communist Party virus” on social media. Haidian District police initially criminally detained Chen for “fabricating and deliberately disseminating fake information” on March 11 but changed the criminal charge upon formally arresting him. Chen is being held at Haidian District Detention Center.
* Tycoon Ren Zhiqiang (任志强) went [missing](https://wqw2010.blogspot.com/2020/03/4_15.html) on March 12 after writing an [essay](https://chinadigitaltimes.net/chinese/2020/03/%E4%BB%BB%E5%BF%97%E5%BC%BA%EF%BC%9A%E4%BA%BA%E6%B0%91%E7%9A%84%E7%94%9F%E5%91%BD%E8%A2%AB%E7%97%85%E6%AF%92%E5%92%8C%E4%BD%93%E5%88%B6%E7%9A%84%E9%87%8D%E7%97%85%E5%85%B1%E5%90%8C%E4%BC%A4%E5%AE%B3/) [titled](https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2020/03/translation-essay-by-missing-property-tycoon-ren-zhiqiang/) “Lives Are Being Harmed by Both the Virus and the Disease in the Political System,” in which he criticised Xi and the government’s handling of the epidemic. The government [announced](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/07/world/asia/china-tycoon-coronavirus.html) on April 7 that he was under investigation
* Yingcheng City police [formally arrested](https://www.nchrd.org/2020/04/reprisals-against-human-rights-democracy-activists-during-covid-19-mainland-china-hong-kong/) activist Zeng Chunzhi (曾春智) on charges of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” on April 17 for organising local residents to protest against price gouging of essential goods during the coronavirus lockdown. Local residents in Haishan District under lockdown were forced to buy food and staple items from the local property management office, which charged them higher prices on essential goods. Zeng organised a protest with hundreds of residents in the housing compound on March 12, where they shouted slogans like “Haishan property management should get out, disband property management and property committee”. Police administratively detained Zeng on March 27, then criminally detained her on April 9, before formally arresting her on April 17. She is being held at Yingcheng City Detention Center.
* Chinese authorities forcibly disappeared two prisoners of conscience into quarantine away from their families upon their release from lengthy prison sentences in April. Poet and activist [Li Bifeng](https://www.nchrd.org/2011/01/prisoner-of-conscience-li-bifeng/) was released on April 7 after serving a 10-year prison sentence and human rights lawyer [Wang Quanzhang](https://www.nchrd.org/2016/01/wang-quanzhang/) was released on April 5 following a 4.5-year sentence. Sichuan authorities forced Li Bifeng into “quarantine” in a guesthouse but refused to disclose the exact location to his family. Shandong authorities would not allow Wang to return to his home in Beijing and reunite with his wife and son, but forced him into “quarantine” in Jinan, Shandong, where his hukou is registered. Wang was eventually allowed to return home on April 27, after his wife had a medical emergency.
* Three young volunteers of “Terminus2049” Github website documenting censored news and information about COVID-19, Chen Mei (陈玫), Cai Wei (蔡伟), and Cai’s girlfriend Xiao Tang (小唐) [went missing](https://www.nchrd.org/2020/04/china-detains-three-youths-for-documenting-censored-information-about-covid-19/) on April 19, 2020 and later confirmed detained by Beijing police, according to their family, friends and employers. On April 23 and 24, Cai Wei and Xiao Tang’s families received notifications from Beijing Chaoyang Public Security Bureau about the two having been placed under “residential surveillance in (police) designated location,” a form of detention that allows the police to hold them incommunicado without access to a lawyer of their choice for up to six months. Both are held on suspicion of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble) and Xiao Tang is also on suspicion of “harbouring a criminal”. Chen Mei’s family did not receive any notification until May 14. Xiao Tang was released on May 13 on “bail pending further investigation” and allowed to return home.
* Chenzhou City police [seized](https://www.nchrd.org/2020/05/veteran-activists-imprisoned-and-detained-for-online-speech/) activist [Xie Wenfei (谢文飞)](https://www.nchrd.org/2016/08/xie-fengxia/) on April 29, 2020 and criminally detained him the next day on suspicion of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble.” Xie had recently criticized the detention of [the three young volunteers](https://www.nchrd.org/2020/04/china-detains-three-youths-for-documenting-censored-information-about-covid-19/) who posted censored information about COVID-19 online, the disappearances of citizen journalists [Fang Bin and Chen Qiushi](https://www.nchrd.org/2020/04/a-healthy-society-should-not-have-just-one-voice-china-must-end-crackdown-on-online-speech-in-response-to-covid-19/) in Wuhan, and had [signed](https://msguancha.com/a/lanmu50/2020/0219/19411.html) an online petition to commemorate Dr. Li Wenliang. Xie is currently detained at Zixing City Detention Center.
* Shanghai police criminally [detained](https://www.nchrd.org/2020/05/police-detain-citizen-journalist-zhang-zhan-who-reported-on-covid-19-in-wuhan/) citizen journalist and activist Zhang Zhan (张展) on May 15, 2020, on suspicion of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble.” She had initially gone missing on May 14 in Wuhan. Zhang Zhan is currently detained at Pudong New District Detention Center in Shanghai. She went to Wuhan, the epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak, in early February. She reported numerous stories including the detentions of other independent reporters and harassment of families of victims seeking accountability from the epicenter via her WeChat, [Twitter](http://twitter.com/@consultorzhang) and [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCsNKkvZGMURFmYkfhYa2HOQ?app=desktop) accounts.
* Officers from Gaoxin Division of Xi’an Public Security Bureau [seized](https://www.nchrd.org/2020/05/police-take-away-journalist-jiang-xue-after-her-article-mourning-dr-li-wenliang/) prominent journalist Jiang Xue (江雪) on May 18 around 7pm after she had visited her elderly mother in the hospital. Jiang had [written an essay](https://theinitium.com/article/20200405-note-jiangxue/) on China’s National Mourning Day on April 4 titled “On National Mourning Day, I Refuse to Join the Arranged Chorus.” That article is likely the cause for her being summoned for interrogation. Her whereabouts and the criminal charges against her are unknown. She was released later that night.

1. **Police Intimidation Suppresses Civil Society Efforts**

Individuals engaging in civil society activities to provide assistance to citizens have been [targeted](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/18/business/china-coronavirus-charity-supplies.html?_ga=2.162967803.655821903.1585639154-1314750064.1581397964). There have been cases of police detaining individuals while they were distributing medical supplies, including face masks. Though the Ministry of Civil Affairs issued a [notice](http://www.chinadevelopmentbrief.cn/news/mca-releases-notice-requesting-social-organizations-to-take-an-active-role-in-epidemic-control/) requesting social organizations take an active role in epidemic control, it is referring to registered social organizations, and many independent civil society groups in China cannot register.

NGOs or individuals in China risk violating the Charity Law if they are not donating or [distributing aid](https://finance.sina.com.cn/china/gncj/2020-02-14/doc-iimxyqvz2931564.shtml) through government-controlled organizations, including the Red Cross Society of China (which is unaffiliated with the International Red Cross). For example, Hubei resident Gao Fei [went missing](https://twitter.com/aiwu8964/status/1222431714728910848)after posting a video message about police closing in on him and about ways to contact and help local residents in need of assistance. Gao had reported about the outbreak first-hand on social media and distributed face masks in local communities. The Red Cross Society was [criticized](https://mailchi.mp/1a36e670b5df/20201-covid-19?e=4df1e1b719) for being slow in distributing masks and other supplies.

Wuhan police sternly warned the public with [a notice](http://www.xinhuanet.com/2020-01/01/c_1125412773.htm) on January 1 that police had summoned and penalized eight people for “spreading false information” online about the virus. Starting in late January, two human rights lawyers took the risk to [file](https://wqw2010.blogspot.com/2020/01/8.html) government information disclosure [requests](https://msguancha.com/a/lanmu4/2020/0120/19318.html) over the fate of the eight individual penalized by Wuhan police.

Police across the country have visited activists and lawyers to threaten them into silence about the government’s handling of the virus outbreak. Guangzhou-based disbarred lawyer Sui Muqing [received](https://twitter.com/CHRDnet/status/1222507242471161857) threats from police for posting information online; artist Wang Zang and his family have been [harassed](https://wqw2010.blogspot.com/2020/01/blog-post_93.html) by police in Yunnan (Wang Zang has now been detained on “inciting subversion” charges); Hunan activist Chen Siming [reported](https://twitter.com/CHRDnet/status/1222555590804639745) being hauled into a police station and forced to delete tweets and promise to stop tweeting; and Changsha police [seized](https://www.msguancha.com/a/lanmu4/2020/0130/19336.html) Fan Junyi for sharing foreign media reports.

Chinese police [intimidated and harassed](https://www.nchrd.org/2020/04/chinese-authorities-threaten-covid-19-victims-families-seeking-compensation/) potential plaintiffs in litigation against Wuhan and Hubei governments. Authorities pressured victims and families to abandon efforts to seek legal consul online, give media interviews, or contact lawyers offering legal aid. A group of lawyers, now expanded to about 20, announced the formation of “COVID-19 Compensation Legal Advisory Group” on March 6. They have been offering to provide legal aid to victims or families seeking compensation and redress for deaths or damages due to negligence or mismanagement by authorities in Wuhan and Hubei. On April 20, the group made available [a template and a guideline](https://www.msguancha.com/a/lanmu9/2020/0421/19660.html) for filing legal claims. A dozen families contacted the lawyers. By April 22, at least six families whose loved ones died after contracting the virus and one woman who recovered from COVID-19, under intense [threats and harassment](https://www.msguancha.com/a/lanmu4/2020/0430/19692.html), were forced to abandon their efforts and ceased their contacts with the lawyers. National security police also got involved in investigating the group.

There have been small demonstrations of workers who demanded compensation for payment promised by the authorities for working in the COVID-19 emergency response. There were also clashes between migrant workers from Hubei province– the original epicenter of the outbreak – and residents and police in the neighboring Jiangxi Province. Workers started to take collective action again in mid to late-February after a month of lockdown across the country. Many of the protests were in service and transport industries. The protests were related to [economic distress](https://clb.org.hk/content/collective-protests-begin-flare-again-china-returns-work) caused by the outbreak.

1. **China’s Crackdown on Free Expression Related to COVID-19**

We have documented 897 cases in China involving punishment of Chinese citizens for their online speech or information-sharing related to the coronavirus outbreak. These cases occurred between January 1 and March 26, 2020. We gathered most of these cases from Chinese state media reports or government announcements that we could find. Given the difficulties to obtain unfiltered or full access to information on the Chinee internet, the list is incomplete. We managed to collect some detailed information about the 897 cases, which occurred in almost every province, autonomous region, and municipality in China.

On January 20, the government-controlled Xinhua News Agency acknowledged the coronavirus epidemic and Xi’s direct leadership in a “people’s war” to fight it. This was the first time Chinese authorities disclosed to the public that virus could spread through human-to-human transmission.

One month later, on February 21, the Ministry of Public Security announced 5,111 cases involving “fabricating and deliberately disseminating false and harmful information” intervened or penalized by police. No details of these cases were provided. The announcement signalled the government’s determination to further obstruct the flow of information and independent reporting, and silence critical voices, which are vital for effective responses to a public health emergency of such magnitude.

Of the total, 180 cases involve individuals arbitrarily detained in administrative detention (116 cases), criminal detention (9 cases), or enforced disappearance (5 cases). In over half of these cases, we could not find the specific punishments meted out against the “offenders.” Of the specified types of punishment, police favoured administrative detention (18.5% of the total) and “educational reprimand” (17.8% of the total).

A screenshot of a cell phone

Description automatically generated

The offenses or crimes or pretext that authorities used to back up the punishments include “spreading rumours,” “fabricating false information,” “causing panic,” “disrupting public/social order,” and “leaking privacy.” In the vast majority of these cases, or 93% of the total, police cited “spreading misinformation, disrupting public order” as the pretext for punishing online speech related to COVID-19 outbreak in China.

A screenshot of a social media post

Description automatically generated

WeChat was the social media platform most commonly cited by authorities as the channel used by the “offenders” to share information or post comments on COVID-19. In 678 cases, police did not specify the specific social media app. Of the 219 cases where police identified the social media platform, WeChat was cited in 94% of these cases. This is an indication that Chinese police are closely monitoring WeChat, which is the most popular social media app in China with nearly a billion Chinese users. In some instances, WeChat users had their accounts deleted in relation to their online comments during the coronavirus outbreak, which, for many, effectively cut off social and professional contacts and restricted their daily life—travel, food delivery, banking and payments—which had been taken over by the app.

A screenshot of a cell phone

Description automatically generated

According to a timeline constructed by CHRD, after the January 20 Xinhua announcement, when information about the rapidly spreading virus was critically important for the public, who were nervous and scared, Chinese police acted with apparently concerted nationwide operations in penalizing many more online users—396 of the 897 cases occurred between January 21-31. Before January 21, only 10 individuals were penalized, eight on January 1, one on January 3 and one on January 18.

In February, the number of punishments shown on our list peaked with 467 individuals sanctioned. The death of Dr Li Wenliang from coronavirus on February 6 drew massive outcry on Chinese social media, with an outpouring of grief, anger, and denouncements of government officials. Many Chinese netizens demanded their right to free speech. The spike of penalties imposed by police on online users in February likely reflected a heightened crackdown by authorities in response to the surge of expressed strong emotions on the Internet over Dr Li’s death. Government censors ordered state media to downplay his death and dispatched CCP discipline officials from Beijing to Wuhan to conduct an investigation.

In March, as of the 26th, we were able to tally 23 cases. Though many of the 897 cases on our list have likely been included in the 5,111 cases that the government announced on February 21, we have been able to find 54 new cases, which occurred or were reported between February 21 and March 26.

1. **Censorship Prevents Critical Information Flow**

Local government cover-up and lack of transparency on the spread of the virus, which dictated the under-reporting in state-controlled media, may have contributed to the rapid spread of the coronavirus before Xi Jinping’s public announcement on January 20 about its threat. The downplaying of the risks of the virus had been reinforced by widely publicized police action against individuals who spoke out online in December.

China’s invasive digital surveillance system has been deployed by police to silence netizens and reinforce information controls. On social media sites, netizens reported being visited, detained, or penalized by police for “spreading rumours” after they posted comments on the outbreak, and in some cases, for volunteering in distributing face masks and other supplies. Several human rights defenders have reported being visited by police and threatened with criminal sanctions unless they stopped sharing international news reporting or tweeting information about the outbreak. Press have been restricted: in one incident, Wuhan police [briefly detained](https://news.rthk.hk/rthk/ch/component/k2/1502706-20200114.htm) Hong Kong journalists from RTHK, Commercial Radio, TVB, and NOW TV on January 14 outside Jinyintan Hospital and forced them to delete their footage. While misinformation could lead to panic, the authoritarian Chinese government’s systematic suppression of information and censorship on the press has led to a botched response to the coronavirus outbreak.

According to a [report](https://citizenlab.ca/2020/03/censored-contagion-how-information-on-the-coronavirus-is-managed-on-chinese-social-media) from the University of Toronto’s Citizen Lab, beginning on December 31, Chinese social media app YY began to censor keywords related to the new virus. WeChat, the most popular app in China with nearly 1 billion Chinese users, began to censor keywords starting on January 1.

State-run Xinhua News Agency [stressed](http://www.xinhuanet.com/2020-01/27/c_1125506246.htm) “maintaining a clear network environment” over “rumours” tied to the outbreak. Censors [have](https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2020/01/minitrue-delete-disciplined-doctor-now-in-isolation-ward/) [deleted](https://chinadigitaltimes.net/chinese/2020/01/%E5%A4%A7%E5%AE%B6-%E6%AD%A6%E6%B1%89%E8%82%BA%E7%82%8E-50-%E5%A4%A9%EF%BC%8C%E5%85%A8%E4%BD%93%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%E4%BA%BA%E9%83%BD%E5%9C%A8%E6%89%BF%E5%8F%97%E5%AA%92%E4%BD%93%E6%AD%BB%E4%BA%A1/) a [number of articles](https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2020/01/minitrue-delete-article-on-economic-impact-of-who-declaring-coronavirus-an-emergency/), including by state media groups, which has [prevented](https://chinadigitaltimes.net/chinese/2020/01/cds%e6%a1%a3%e6%a1%88%ef%bd%9c2020%e5%b9%b41%e6%9c%88%e4%b8%ad%e5%9b%bd%e8%a8%80%e8%ae%ba%e5%ae%a1%e6%9f%a5%e7%ba%aa%e8%a6%81%ef%bc%9a%e6%9e%81%e6%9d%83%e7%9a%84%e5%88%87%e5%b0%94%e8%af%ba%e8%b4%9d/) the flow of information and silenced public opinion and critical scrutiny of the government’s response. Social media platform WeChat [announced](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MzA5MzEzNDg3MQ==&mid=2652771043&idx=1&sn=c323bf03c7a0d439c691899e0985ba81&chksm=8b883b9bbcffb28d7f0fcfb53aaf5a2b6db0ac272ced9743838d443af7764ee6253c569a8bb2&mpshare=1&scene=1&srcid=&sharer_sharetime=1580241713617&sharer_shareid=d36ac106ecf165cc27ef6533e8eda7bf&exportkey=Aci0y7X%2BVTX516p0Jgr4zgQ%3D&pass_ticket=csECBhVVtko49SJKYWEJjcrN8tsHverRufZpXniIJVRZUqOlhJN9Cg9PIRdUHW%2BF#rd) the introduction of special measures for handling “rumours” on its platforms, including deploying “professional third-party rumour removal agencies.” One Hubei Daily journalist was [forced to admit wrong doing](https://matters.news/@hzuomin/%E8%AF%A5%E9%81%93%E6%AD%89%E7%9A%84%E6%B2%A1%E9%81%93%E6%AD%89-%E4%B8%8D%E8%AF%A5%E9%81%93%E6%AD%89%E7%9A%84%E9%81%93%E6%AD%89%E4%BA%86-zdpuAkdPvhCn4h9mni9wv3Lz3edHRhv2q4AFiAAciv1aAr3bp) for suggesting Wuhan leaders step down for mishandling the crisis. The Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention [reportedly issued](https://theinitium.com/article/20200125-mainland-wuhan-sars-pneumonia-publicity/) an order prohibiting medical personnel from speaking with reporters. On January 26, a hospital in Taizhou, Jiangsu Province, [penalized](https://www.nchrd.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/%E6%B3%B0%E5%B7%9E%E5%B8%82%E7%AC%AC%E4%BA%8C%E4%BA%BA%E6%B0%91%E5%8C%BB%E9%99%A2%E9%80%9A%E7%9F%A5.jpeg) a nurse for speaking out about the coronavirus in a WeChat group with her classmates. The hospital warned other staff not to speak with journalists or on social media.

1. **Incidents of Discrimination against Wuhan-Hubei Residents**

There are [several reports](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MjEwMzA5NTcyMQ==&mid=2653108083&idx=1&sn=c95beda99923bd33186ba17051ef8f32&chksm=4eb2d1b579c558a38c6157ca794d7aa4dcdf8cb182e2671a2e949941e00a676c73bd59448e24&mpshare=1&srcid=&sharer_sharetime=1580333621608&sharer_shareid=d36ac106ecf165cc27ef6533e8eda7bf&from=timeline&scene=2&subscene=2&clicktime=1580408147&enterid=1580408147&ascene=2&devicetype=android-27&version=27000a41&nettype=WIFI&abtest_cookie=AQABAAgAAQCdhh4AAAA%3D&lang=zh_CN&exportkey=AUL9lvuQKcJ2%2FvuuwOO7F38%3D&pass_ticket=i5I4QubqHLg2I9j6QkQRvGtc2XImvTL24G8YusYh5DJSpJcxirZCTr3JP3gMBBmw&wx_header=1&forceh5=1) of Hubei or Wuhan residents who left before the lockdown being refused service at hotels or restaurants. Some were forced to go to rescue centers or homeless shelters. There are also reports of passengers refusing to board planes with Wuhan or Hubei residents on board, or airlines cancelling Wuhan-Hubei resident’s flights or refusing services to them. One Wuhan women [said](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MjEwMzA5NTcyMQ==&mid=2653108083&idx=1&sn=c95beda99923bd33186ba17051ef8f32&chksm=4eb2d1b579c558a38c6157ca794d7aa4dcdf8cb182e2671a2e949941e00a676c73bd59448e24&mpshare=1&srcid=&sharer_sharetime=1580333621608&sharer_shareid=d36ac106ecf165cc27ef6533e8eda7bf&from=timeline&scene=2&subscene=2&clicktime=1580408147&enterid=1580408147&ascene=2&devicetype=android-27&version=27000a41&nettype=WIFI&abtest_cookie=AQABAAgAAQCdhh4AAAA%3D&lang=zh_CN&exportkey=AUL9lvuQKcJ2%2FvuuwOO7F38%3D&pass_ticket=i5I4QubqHLg2I9j6QkQRvGtc2XImvTL24G8YusYh5DJSpJcxirZCTr3JP3gMBBmw&wx_header=1&forceh5=1) she was forced to undergo health tests to “prove” she had not been infected, at her own cost. Personal information of Wuhan residents has been [leaked](http://china.caixin.com/2020-01-26/101508509.html) and posted online. A person originally from Wuhan, who ran a B&B in Yunnan province, [reportedly](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MjEwMzA5NTcyMQ==&mid=2653108083&idx=1&sn=c95beda99923bd33186ba17051ef8f32&chksm=4eb2d1b579c558a38c6157ca794d7aa4dcdf8cb182e2671a2e949941e00a676c73bd59448e24&mpshare=1&srcid=&sharer_sharetime=1580333621608&sharer_shareid=d36ac106ecf165cc27ef6533e8eda7bf&from=timeline&scene=2&subscene=2&clicktime=1580408147&enterid=1580408147&ascene=2&devicetype=android-27&version=27000a41&nettype=WIFI&abtest_cookie=AQABAAgAAQCdhh4AAAA%3D&lang=zh_CN&exportkey=AUL9lvuQKcJ2%2FvuuwOO7F38%3D&pass_ticket=i5I4QubqHLg2I9j6QkQRvGtc2XImvTL24G8YusYh5DJSpJcxirZCTr3JP3gMBBmw&wx_header=1&forceh5=1) received death threats online after offering space for stranded Wuhan and Hubei residents who had been kicked out of hotels.

Some Hubei residents posted on [online platforms](https://www.zhihu.com/question/373625023/answer/1160203283) saying they were rejected by employers many times because they came from Hubei. On April 16, a [report emerged](https://news.sina.com.cn/c/2020-04-16/doc-iircuyvh8135131.shtml) that some companies and employment agencies at Majuqiao Labour Market in Beijing have “hidden rules” to screen job applicants in order to avoid hiring workers from Hubei. On March 27, police officers from Hubei and Jiangxi and the public [clashed at the border](https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/3077393/coronavirus-police-public-clash-border-reopens-between-hubei-and) recently reopened between the two provinces, when the Jiangxi police tried to stop migrant workers from Hubei from entering Jiangxi.

In [another case](http://k.sina.com.cn/article_1651428902_626ece2602000pbkd.html?from=news&subch=onews), 24 construction workers from Hubei were denied entry to a construction site in Jingde Town, Jiangxi on March 26, because of their residential background and forced to return to Hubei the next day. Another young person from Hubei received a notice from her company—an e-commerce company—asking her to resign when she arrived in Shenzhen on March 25.

Residents of Hubei have also reported discrimination in housing. The Xiamen Asia Gulf Hotel in Fujian Province denied access to Hubei guests, according to a [social media post](https://www.weibo.com/u/2731177650?refer_flag=1001030103_) from April 7. In one video clip posted on [social media](https://www.weibo.com/1624137625/IC5uY0zMg?refer_flag=1001030103_&type=comment) on April 6, a landlord, reportedly also in Fujian, refused to rent room to a person from Hubei, resulting in clashes. A Hubei woman who worked in Guangzhou was [reportedly not allowed](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/37p72nm9Y_CSAZ0wcSTRxQ) by her landlord to return to stay in the flat she rented. There have been other reports of people with Hubei hukou (residential registration) being refused to return to their homes in other provinces even though they had not been in Hubei since the outbreak began.

In Jiangxi Province, a widely circulated [photo](https://www.dcdapp.com/ugc/article/1657669408229387), posted online on February 4, showed a banner hanging out a supermarket in Jiujiang City with the slogan “People who return from Hubei are time bombs.” There have been [reports](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/37p72nm9Y_CSAZ0wcSTRxQ) that buses from Hubei province were not allowed to enter Shanghai in mid-March and many people from Hubei were [“persuaded” to return to Hubei](http://finance.ifeng.com/c/7vA3Qi81VVA) when they took buses to other cities. A [toilet sign](http://m.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_6551727) in a Guangxi public restroom designated stalls for Hubei visitors only.

The government response to the reported incidents of discrimination so far has been inadequate. Though China’s [Law on the Prevention and Treatment of Infectious Diseases](http://www.npc.gov.cn/wxzl/gongbao/2013-10/22/content_1811005.htm) explicitly prohibits discrimination against patients or suspected patients of infectious diseases (art. 16), authorities have not enforced the law. It is also illegal under art 12 and 68 of this law to disclose private details of patients or suspected patients. The Ministry of Public Security [said](http://www.xinhuanet.com/2020-01/28/c_1125508661.htm) police would crack down on illegal activities like hoarding supplies and price hikes, but authorities have so far failed to respond to or call out discrimination as illegal acts.

There have been alarming reports since early April of [discriminatory mistreatment](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/african-students-mistreated-evicted-china-coronavirus-200412100315200.html) of Africans migrants living in China in the context of government efforts to prevent a new wave of infections coming from abroad. On the Internet, videos and photos displayed African migrants [evicted](https://twitter.com/BlackLivityCN/status/1248268605269127168), refused rooms at hotels, and forced to sleep on Guangzhou’s city streets and police [harassing](https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/10/china/africans-guangzhou-china-coronavirus-hnk-intl/index.html) Africans on the street. Authorities have forced African immigrants to be tested or quarantined for coronavirus. In some cases, some African migrants were tested for several times without being given any results. They have been denied access to shops, malls, or [restaurants](https://twitter.com/sampiranty/status/1249107627080122369) that are open to Chinese customers. There are thousands of migrants and businessmen from Africa in Guangzhou, an international trading hub. [Several](https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-african-diplomats-protest-alleged-racism-and-inhumane-treatment-of/) [African](https://twitter.com/GhanaMFA/status/1248932766223302658) [governments](https://twitter.com/GeoffreyOnyeama/status/1248348204950831104) have demanded that China address these concerns of discriminatory policies and practices targeting African migrants and visitors.

The lack of a specific and comprehensive anti-discrimination law has hindered any efforts to prevent and eliminate discrimination in China. In the past, Chinese courts have taken only modest steps to enforce existing legislation that prohibit certain types of discrimination, such as the Labor Law, Employment Promotion Law, and laws on education, and protection of women’s and disabled persons’ rights. There have been no known fines or punishment handed down by judicial authorities against any alleged offenders in coronavirus-related cases of discrimination. In fact, it is very difficult for victims, whether migrants from Hubei or Africa, to figure out how or where to file such lawsuits. The lack of an enforceable comprehensive anti-discrimination law and weak enforcement of existing legislation explains the ineffectiveness of official [speeches](http://www.chinanews.com/gn/2020/03-23/9134979.shtml) against discrimination, or the Chinese legislative body’s [call on](http://language.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202004/13/WS5e93f48ba3105d50a3d15c99.html) local governments to provide assistance to workers from regions hit hard by coronavirus.

1. **Lack of Government Transparency a Critical Failure in Emergency Response**

Lack of transparency in China’s authoritarian political system led to a failure in warning the public and implementing a rapid response to a public health crisis of this magnitude. Wuhan authorities downplayed the number of cases, likely to hide “negative” stories from Central authorities. This response dictated the under-reporting in state-controlled media, and which may have contributed to the rapid spread of the coronavirus by not giving the local population necessary public health information to protect themselves.

The first case in Wuhan was dated on December 8, tied to the Wuhan Seafood Market, though there are now reports of even [earlier cases](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)30183-5/fulltext). On December 30, 2019, Wuhan Health Commission alerted the public to an “unknown pneumonia” but also sent a directive prohibiting doctors and nurses from disclosing any information about the outbreak to the public. The next day, on December 31, 2019, Chinese authorities informed the World Health Organisation. On January 1, 2020 Wuhan Public Security Bureau announced it had “punished” eight individuals for “spreading false information” online about the virus. The effect of the notice was a stern warning to the public to keep silent about the virus. Authorities closed the Wuhan Seafood Market on January 1. The downplaying of the risks of the virus had been reinforced by widely publicized police action in early January against individuals who spoke out online in late December to try and sound the alarm of the new virus.

Even after state media [reported](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-01/09/c_138690297.htm)on January 9 that a new strain of coronavirus had been identified, the government continued to tell the public that there [was](http://www.xinhuanet.com/2020-01/11/c_1125448269.htm)“no evidence” of human-to-human transmission. [Medical staff](http://opinion.caixin.com/2020-01-21/101506670.html)had been infected as [early](http://www.caixin.com/2020-01-22/101507157.html)as January 5, and by mid-January, reportedly 500 medical staff had been infected. Infection of medical staff is a key indicator of human-to-human transmission.

Wuhan Health Commission [claimed](http://wjw.wuhan.gov.cn/front/web/showDetail/2020011109036) that no new patients with the new virus had been [detected](http://wjw.wuhan.gov.cn/front/web/showDetail/2020011809064) between January 3-16, despite numerous [accounts](https://msguancha.com/a/lanmu1/2020/0124/19326.html) being shared online of the city’s residents showing symptoms and being turned away from hospitals without being tested. Cases occurred during that time period, however, as later [announced](http://www.caixin.com/2020-01-22/101507157.html). That time period coincided with the lead up to the Hubei Province People’s Congress session, which [was held](http://www.hppc.gov.cn/2020/0118/31955.html) from January 12-17.  Chinese authorities routinely suppress “negative” information under “stability maintenance” measures prior to political meetings.

Authorities did not disclose that virus could spread through [human-to-human transmission](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-01/20/c_138721785.htm) until January 20. Wuhan city and provincial Hubei authorities didn’t sound the alarm until after President Xi Jinping finally made a public [announcement](http://xinhuanet.com/english/2020-01/20/c_138721535.htm) about the outbreak. The Mayor of Wuhan later [claimed](https://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2020/01/28/world/asia/ap-as-china-outbreak-missteps.html) that he “could only disclose information after being authorized” by higher authorities.

Failing to share information with the public has not been limited to Wuhan. In Shanghai, health authorities [denied](https://news.163.com/20/0119/17/F3967BDQ0001899O.html) that there were any cases in the city on January 19 and claimed that “online information may not be true”, but then [announced](http://wsjkw.sh.gov.cn/xwfb/20200121/5b01c1a678df4faab338d9ed1efdc958.html) the next day, after Xi’s announcement, that they had confirmed one case.