

US, EU Urge China to Release Human Rights Lawyer Accused of Subversion

The CCP uses its criminal justice system as a 'political instrument' to further its authoritarian rule, a U.S. congressional report said.

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Chinese lawyer Yu Wensheng in Beijing on Jan. 12, 2017. Fred Dufour/AFP/Getty Images



By [Frank Fang](#)

1/8/2025 Updated: 1/8/2025

The United States and the European Union are demanding that China release a Chinese human rights lawyer after his appeal against conviction was rejected by a Chinese court on Jan. 6.

Yu Wensheng, one of China's most outspoken human rights lawyers, and his wife, Xu Yan, were on their way to [meet](#) with EU diplomats in Beijing in April 2023 when they were detained.

They were never released before they were [sentenced](#) in November 2024 for "inciting subversion of state power," a vague state security charge often levied against dissidents and critics of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Yu was given a three-year prison sentence, and Xu was given one year and nine months.

On Jan. 6, the Suzhou Intermediate People's Court upheld its three-year sentence against Yu, a decision that has drawn international criticism.

U.S. Ambassador to China Nicholas Burns said in a Jan. 7 [post](#) on social media platform X that he was "very disappointed" in the court's decision.

"The United States reiterates our call for the PRC to immediately release Yu," Burns said, using the abbreviation of China's official name, the People's Republic of China.

The EU diplomatic arm the European External Action Service called for Yu's "immediate and unconditional release," according to a [statement](#) released on Jan. 6.

"The EU will continue to monitor the situation closely and engage with Chinese authorities to advocate for the respect of human rights and the rule of law," the statement reads.

The European External Action Service urged China to guarantee Xu's timely release, scheduled for Jan. 13. It also called on Beijing to ensure her safety and well-being when she is released.

‘A Political Instrument’

The case comes less than two weeks before President-elect Donald Trump is set to take office, and it remains to be seen how the incoming Trump administration will confront communist China’s human rights abuses.

[Trump’s nominee](#) for secretary of state, Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), is a strong critic of the CCP and a [commissioner](#) on the bicameral Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC), which tracks the Chinese regime’s compliance with international human rights standards.

In May 2017, when serving as chair of the CECC, Rubio issued a [statement](#) criticizing Beijing for its continued assault on Chinese human rights lawyers.

“If China persists in viewing its own citizens with suspicion and hostility and if it continues to ruthlessly disregard their most basic rights, it will never be viewed as a responsible global stakeholder,” Rubio said at the time.

Yu and Xu were listed as one of the political prisoner cases of concern in CECC’s [annual report](#) published in December 2024. The [report](#) points out that the Chinese criminal justice system “remained a political instrument used for maintaining social order in furtherance of the Chinese Communist Party’s authoritarian rule.”

According to the report, rights lawyers were subjected to abuse, including criminal prosecution, as a result of their legal work.

“After completing their sentences, lawyers typically have their law license revoked and are subjected to surveillance, restrictions on domestic and international travel, repeated forced relocation, and punishment of their family members, such as denial of education,” the report reads.

‘Beijing’s Deep Fear’

Yu was the recipient of the [2021 Martin Ennals Award](#), an international human rights honor awarded annually and decided by a jury comprising 10 global human rights organizations.

In 2022, he received a [human rights award](#) from the Stockholm-based Foundation of Anna Dahlback Memorial Fund.

Yu is known for defending activists and adherents of [Falun Gong](#), a spiritual group that has been severely persecuted by the CCP since 1999.

“There are no laws in China that specifically criminalize the practice of Falun Gong,” Yu said in a 2017 interview with The Epoch Times.

“Whether it’s the police, the procuratorates, or the courts, they must consider that if they continue persecuting Falun Gong, they will be held responsible in the future.”

Falun Gong, also known as Falun Dafa, is a spiritual meditation discipline based on the principles of truthfulness, compassion, and tolerance. For the past 25 years, Falun Gong practitioners—numbering up to 100 million in 1999, according to official estimates at the time—have faced mass arrest, lengthy imprisonment, torture, and even [forced organ harvesting](#).

The Chinese court’s decision to reject Yu’s appeal has also drawn [criticism](#) from international rights organizations.

Kate Schuetze, interim regional deputy director for research at Amnesty International, said the charges against Yu and Xu “are entirely baseless,” according to a [statement](#) issued on Jan. 6.

“The Chinese government has used Yu’s online comments and his numerous international human rights awards as an excuse to label him a threat to national security. But all this really demonstrates is Beijing’s deep fear of human rights defenders who dare to dissent,” Schuetze said.

“Yu Wensheng and Xu Yan have been imprisoned solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression and they must be released immediately and unconditionally.”

Dorothy Li contributed to this report.



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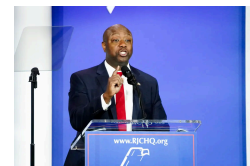
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