



China Frees Prominent AIDS Activist

MONTREAL – The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network expressed relief today at the news that Chinese AIDS activist Dr. Wan Yanhai has been released by state security in Beijing after 26 days of detention, reiterating the importance of his efforts to bring public attention to China’s growing HIV/AIDS crisis.

“We are thrilled about this development,” said Ralf Jürgens, executive director of the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network. “We understand that Dr. Wan is in good health, and has been in contact with colleagues in Beijing as well as his wife in Los Angeles.”

“Although we remained concerned by the government view that Dr. Wan has disseminated information illegally, we congratulate Chinese authorities for ending his detention,” said Joanne Csete, director of the HIV/AIDS program at Human Rights Watch. “Now that he has been released, the ability of Dr. Wan and his colleagues to resume their work without harassment will be a barometer of how serious the Chinese government intends to be in responding to the HIV/AIDS epidemic unfolding within its borders.”

Dr. Wan was selected in July to become the first recipient of a prestigious international human rights award established this year by the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network and Human Rights Watch. Due to his detention, he was unable to attend an award ceremony held in Montreal last Friday. The “Award for Action on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights” was presented to his wife in his absence. Wan has been a prominent advocate for the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS in China. An outspoken critic of the Chinese government’s slow response to HIV/AIDS, he has worked to publicize a growing epidemic in Henan province, where thousands of rural villagers were infected with HIV through faulty blood collection practices at government-backed clinics. On August 24, Wan was reported missing by friends and relatives. For several weeks, Chinese authorities refused to confirm his detention and whereabouts. Earlier in August, Wan had anonymously received a “neibu” (secret) AIDS research report on the blood collection scandal in Henan province prepared by government health officials, that he then forwarded to an electronic mailing list.

“It is not yet clear whether Dr. Wan will face fines or punishment for distributing this report, and we hope his release signals instead a new willingness by Chinese authorities to work more collaboratively with him and other activists,” said Jürgens. “He certainly should not be punished for doing what was in China’s best interest, and in the interest of public health and human rights. We understand from his wife that he hopes to return to the United States in October, and we will be inviting Dr. Wan to travel to Montreal in the near future to explain more about his work and how we can support it. Although his release is very good news, much remains to be done to address the growing HIV/AIDS and human rights crisis in China.”

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Additional information about Dr. Wan Yanhai’s work and the *Awards for Action on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights* is available online at <http://www.aidslaw.ca/Maincontent/awards.htm>.

About the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network

The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network (www.aidslaw.ca) is a national organization engaged in education, legal and ethical analysis, and policy development. Founded in 1992, the Network’s promotes responses to HIV/AIDS that respect human rights; facilitate prevention efforts and access to care, treatment and support; minimize the adverse impact of HIV/AIDS on individuals and communities; and address the social and economic factors that increase vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and to human rights abuses. The Network is an NGO in Special

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Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. Its work has received national and international recognition, and the United Nations Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS has included the Network's activities in UNAIDS' collection of "best practices."