

# Chinese to Prosecute Peasant Who Resisted One-Child Policy

Decision Reveals Growing Clout of Beijing Hard-Liners

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BEIJING, July 7 -- The Chinese government is preparing to prosecute a blind peasant who exposed excesses by authorities in enforcing the one-child policy in eastern China, where local officials were accused by residents of forcing thousands of people to undergo sterilization or to abort pregnancies. The decision, disclosed by court officials Friday, follows a prolonged bureaucratic stalemate in the ruling Communist Party over how to handle the allegations in the city of Linyi, and it highlights the growing clout of hard-liners in the party since President Hu Jintao took office three years ago.

Chen Guangcheng, 34, the blind rural activist who drew international attention to a violent crackdown on unauthorized births in Linyi last year, is scheduled to be tried July 17 on charges of destruction of property and assembling a crowd to disrupt traffic, according to his attorney, Li Jinsong.

The charges stem from an incident in March in which Chen is accused of leading a protest against local officials who had illegally confined him to his house and who were beating villagers who tried to help him, Li and residents of Chen's village said.

Chen's trial could renew international scrutiny of China's population-control practices, and it represents a major setback for reformers in the government who have been trying to soften the one-child policy and eliminate the abuses long associated with it.

"There isn't much hope," said Chen's wife, Yuan Weijing, by telephone from the family farmhouse, where she has been detained. "Everything that has happened runs counter to Hu Jintao's talk of democracy and governing by law. We live in a nation without law, a nation without morality."

The U.N. Population Fund, which has a significant presence in China, has repeatedly raised Chen's case with the Chinese government, and senior U.S. officials have also pressed the government to release him. In late May, two U.S. diplomats who tried to visit Yuan were physically removed from the village by local officials, she said.

Nearly a dozen lawyers from Beijing have also attempted to visit the village in recent months without success, and several have reported being threatened, detained or beaten by officials or thugs hired by them.

Li said police allowed him and a colleague to meet with Chen last month, but said they prevented them from discussing his defense. When they tried to visit Chen's village to

interview his wife and gather evidence, thugs assaulted them and overturned their car, he said.

"They're afraid of information getting out," said Li, who recorded a death threat he received in Linyi, located 500 miles southeast of Beijing. "They don't want the leadership in Beijing to know the truth about what's happening there."

Before he was detained in September, Chen had tried to organize a class-action lawsuit against Linyi officials, alleging they were illegally forcing parents with two children to be sterilized and women pregnant with a third child to have abortions. Residents also accused officials of detaining and torturing relatives of people who fled the crackdown.

Chen's cause drew support from lawyers, scholars and civic activists across the country, and the government agency responsible for population policies in China, the National Family Planning and Population Commission, launched an investigation in August. At the time, a senior commission official, Yu Xuejun, said he supported the efforts of "ordinary people" in Linyi to assert their rights in the courts, and even offered to help them find lawyers.

A month later, the commission announced it had uncovered evidence of the abuses in Linyi and said some officials there had been fired and detained.

But local authorities fought back, placing Chen under house arrest and launching an aggressive campaign to damage his reputation and deny his allegations. Party sources said Linyi officials distributed a report in Beijing that portrayed Chen as a tool of "foreign anti-China forces," accused him of violating the one-child policy and made much of the fact that he had received overseas funding for his work as an activist on behalf of the disabled.

Linyi officials also lobbied the Foreign Ministry and the powerful Propaganda Department, which agreed to ban any discussion of Chen in the state media and the Internet, the sources said.

For months, the party appeared torn about how to proceed, but the decision to prosecute Chen suggests that the Linyi officials have outmaneuvered others in the government who wanted to use the case to send a strong signal to local officials that forced sterilization and abortion would not be tolerated.

The government has declined to say how many officials were punished in Linyi or to identify any of them, but a Beijing official said "very, very few" were disciplined and a journalist said he was told the total was no more than five. Li Qun, the party chief in Linyi, and other local officials also declined repeated requests for comment.

By linking Chen to hostile foreign forces, party sources said, the Linyi officials made it politically risky for anyone to intervene on his behalf. The national population

commission, for example, rebuked Linyi officials and singled them out for criticism, but refrained from defending Chen or bringing the case to top party leaders, the sources said.

"In the current political environment, in this political system, no official has any incentive to help him," said one Chinese scholar involved in the case who spoke on condition of anonymity. "The risks to your career are great, and there's little to be gained . . . . So the conservatives have a big advantage."

Chen's case was also complicated by an internal party debate over the future of the one-child policy. Some party officials and scholars have urged the government to relax the policy, arguing that it now causes more harm than good and that China faces a retirement crisis as its working-age population shrinks. But provincial leaders and others in the party have resisted.

A party official involved in the debate said Hu and others on the ruling Politburo Standing Committee are unwilling to take a position on the issue ahead of a leadership conference next year. As a result, he said, many in the party are not sure whether they should support Chen or condemn the Linyi officials.

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