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22 January 2026

China: Woman human rights defender Yang Li arbitrarily detained by police on her way to seek critical medical treatment

On 18 January 2026, woman human rights defender **Yang Li** was intercepted by plain-clothes police, detained and forcibly prevented from travelling to Beijing to seek urgent medical treatment whilst in a critical condition.

Yang Li is a woman land human rights defender from Jintan District, Changzhou City, Jiangsu Province. Since 2014, she has peacefully documented and spoken publicly about the human rights impact of illegal land expropriation, forced eviction, and demolition in her community, including the displacement of residents and the lack of adequate compensation. She has pursued legal redress through cases before the Jiangsu High People's Court and a petition submitted in 2023 to Beijing's National Public Complaints and Proposals Administration.

On 18 January 2026, Yang Li was intercepted and detained by police when attempting to travel to Beijing for urgent medical care. Yang Li and her father attempted to travel to Peking University First Hospital for treatment. Immediately after leaving their home in Jintan, plainclothes police officers abducted them and forcibly transferred them to the Jintan Law Enforcement Case Management Centre in private vehicles. They were detained for more than ten hours and to date, both of their mobile phones remain confiscated by the authorities.

On 11 January 2026, whilst under surveillance, police intercepted Yang Li and her father in Beijing while on their way to a medical appointment. They were taken to Sijiqing police station, before being driven back to Jiangsu Province by plainclothes police officers. On 13 January 2026, they were released by police at approximately 12pm.

On 30 December 2025, Yang Li was released from detention facilities in Changzhou, Jiangsu Province having served one year and three months for 'disrupting the work order of state organs.' During her detention, she was subjected to ill-treatment and systematic denial of medical care.

In August 2025, she was diagnosed with a severe condition and was in urgent need of specialised treatment, yet detention centre authorities reportedly refused to approve hospital care. When released on 30 December 2025, she was not transferred to hospital, instead, police continued to restrict her movement and detained her at a police station in Jinba, Jiangsu province for approximately 5 hours. Since then, Yang Li has experienced a rapid deterioration in her health. The implication of not receiving medical treatment has meant that she has not been able to obtain new medication.

This is not the first time that Yang Li has been targeted for her human rights work. For several years, the woman human rights defender and her family have faced reprisals including

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surveillance, harassment, arbitrary detention, physical assaults, and threats from the authorities in China. The denial of medical care appears to form part of a broader pattern of retaliation against her for exposing abuses related to land rights and for her continued pursuit of justice through lawful means.

Front Line Defenders is deeply alarmed by the continued denial of medical care and restrictions on her freedom of movement and believe they are directly linked to her peaceful human rights work. Front Line Defenders is gravely concerned for the physical and psychological integrity of Yang Li, and believe that her life is at imminent risk.

Front Line Defenders calls on the authorities in the People's Republic of China to:

1. Immediately ensure that Yang Li has full and unhindered access to urgent and specialised medical care;

2. Guarantee her right to freedom of movement, including the right to travel and seek medical treatment without interference;

3. Put an end to all acts of harassment, intimidation, and reprisals against Yang Li and her family members;

4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in China can carry out their legitimate activities without fear of reprisals and free from all restrictions.

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