### III. Development of the Rule of Law

#### CIVIL SOCIETY

#### Introduction

Chinese non-governmental organizations (NGOs) vary in scope and focus, and illustrate complex levels of organization in an evolving regulatory environment. Government-registered NGOs are one subset of Chinese NGOs. According to the Ministry of Civil Affairs, at the end of 2015, China had 661,861 registered "social organizations" (shehui zuzhi)—the official term for NGOs—that consisted of 329,122 non-governmental, non-commercial organizations (minban feiqiye danwei), a 12.6-percent increase from the previous year; 4,762 foundations (jijinhui); and 327,977 social associations (shehui tuanti).1 Whereas many registered NGOs in China are governmentorganized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs),2 organizations founded by citizens who have few or no ties with the state, nevertheless, make up a significant subset of Chinese NGOs.3 Many of these NGOs remain unregistered or are registered as business entities due to restrictions and barriers to registration.4 In 2010, a Chinese scholar estimated that 90 percent of NGOs are unregistered,5 while more recent estimates from 2014 range from 40 to 70 percent.<sup>6</sup> The number of unregistered NGOs in China reportedly ranges from 1 million to 8 million.<sup>7</sup> While recent regulatory developments have strengthened the legal basis for public participation in some ways,<sup>8</sup> the Chinese government continued to limit the space in which civil society groups are permitted to work.<sup>9</sup>

## Continued Crackdown and the "Chilling Effect" on Civil Society

During the Commission's 2016 reporting year, the Chinese government and Communist Party continued to deepen a crackdown that began in 2013 on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society advocates 10 working on labor, 11 women's rights, 12 and rights defense advocacy. 13 In addition to the government's "unprecedented attack" on more than 300 rights lawyers and advocates beginning in and around July 2015,14 the international NGO Chinese Human Rights Defenders (CHRD) reported that authorities detained 22 human rights defenders for "political" crimes in 2015 on suspicion of "inciting subversion of state power," equal to the number of individuals reportedly detained under the same charge from 2012 to 2014. 15 [For more information and updates on cases from the July 2015 crackdown on Chinese lawyers, see Section III—Access to Justice.] CHRD also recorded 11 cases of human rights defenders arrested on suspicion of "subversion of state power" in January 2016, "surpassing the documented number from 2012 to 2014 combined." <sup>16</sup> The intensified pressure from central and local government authorities reportedly had a "chilling effect" <sup>17</sup> on the media, <sup>18</sup> labor NGOs, <sup>19</sup> charity workers, <sup>20</sup> and academics, <sup>21</sup> as well as on international NGOs. <sup>22</sup> As one international labor expert noted, the crackdown on civil society appears to be "specifically aimed at the pillars of civil society that have been most effective in pushing the government to do things." 23

During the reporting year, authorities targeted some domestic NGOs and their staff, as illustrated in the following examples:

In December 2015, public security officials harassed or detained at least 25 labor advocates affiliated with labor NGOs in Guangdong province,<sup>24</sup> including staff from the Panyu Workers' Services Center,<sup>25</sup> the Nan Fei Yan Social Work Services Center,<sup>26</sup> Haige Labor Services Center,<sup>27</sup> and the Panyu Workers' Mutual Assistance Group.<sup>28</sup> In January 2016, authorities formally arrested Zeng Feiyang,<sup>29</sup> Zhu Xiaomei,<sup>30</sup> Meng Han,<sup>31</sup> and He Xiaobo <sup>32</sup> reportedly for their organizing work and activities; and released Zhu Xiaomei and He Xiaobo on bail in February <sup>33</sup> and April 2016,<sup>34</sup> respectively.
In January 2016, public security authorities from Beijing municipality reportedly ordered the Beijing Zhongze Women's Legal Counseling and Service Center (Zhongze) to close.<sup>35</sup>

Legal Counseling and Service Center (Zhongze) to close.<sup>35</sup> Zhongze, founded by lawyer Guo Jianmei in 1995 as the Center for Women's Law Studies and Legal Services of Peking University, pioneered impact litigation in domestic violence, sexual harassment, and other women's rights issues.<sup>36</sup> Zhongze also implemented projects in rural women's land rights 37 and submitted reports to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women that reviewed the Chinese government's compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.<sup>38</sup> Despite ongoing difficulties over the years,<sup>39</sup> such as in 2010 when Peking University rescinded its sponsorship of the organization, Guo's work is recognized domestically and internationally.40

Chinese authorities also targeted an international staff member of a legal rights advocacy group during this reporting year. In January 2016, authorities detained Peter Dahlin, a Swedish rights advocate who cofounded the Chinese Urgent Action Working Group, an organization based in Beijing municipality that trained and supported Chinese rights defenders,<sup>41</sup> for three weeks under suspicion of "funding criminal activities harmful to China's national security" before expelling him from the country.<sup>42</sup> On January 19, while Dahlin was in detention, state television aired a prerecorded confession of him admitting to "[violating] Chinese law" and "[causing] harm to the Chinese government." <sup>43</sup> Dahlin later stated in an interview with the New York Times that Chinese authorities had scripted the confession.<sup>44</sup> Officials accused Dahlin's group of receiving foreign funding to train "agents" to "endanger state security." <sup>45</sup> Chinese state media highlighted Dahlin's partnership with Wang Quanzhang, <sup>46</sup> a lawyer at the Fengrui Law Firm in Beijing, <sup>47</sup> whom authorities detained during the crackdown on lawyers and rights advocates that began in and around July 2015.48 Official state media also linked Dahlin's detention to Xing Qingxian, a rights advocate accused of aiding human rights lawyer Wang Yu's son in his attempt to leave China.<sup>49</sup>

The Chinese government's crackdown on NGOs and staff violates rights guaranteed in China's Constitution,<sup>50</sup> as well as international standards on freedom of speech and association set forth in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights<sup>51</sup> and the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.<sup>52</sup> In response to China's crackdown on civil society, in February 2016, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein raised concerns and sought clarification from the Chinese government about the recent arrests of lawyers and harassment of NGO workers. In March 2016, the United States and 11 other nations issued a joint statement at the UN Human Rights Council that expressed concern regarding "China's deteriorating human rights record." A U.S. Department of State spokesperson reportedly remarked that the joint statement was "the first collective action taken regarding China at the Human Rights Council since its inception in 2007." 55

## $Legislative\ Developments$

In the past year, the National People's Congress passed two major laws that pertain to civil society—the PRC Charity Law and the PRC Law on the Management of Overseas NGO Activities in Mainland China. A labor expert called the new laws "the most consequential nonprofit laws passed in the history of the PRC." <sup>56</sup> Observers noted that the Charity Law may promote philanthropy in China and foster better accountability and credibility as the charity sector develops. <sup>57</sup> Yet, they also expressed concerns that the laws' tighter restrictions <sup>58</sup> will likely limit NGOs' access to domestic and international funding, thereby jeopardizing the survival of some NGOs. <sup>59</sup>

#### **PRC Charity Law**

The National People's Congress (NPC) passed the PRC Charity Law in March 2016  $^{60}$  after issuing two drafts for public comment in October 2015 and January 2016.  $^{61}$  Chinese officials released the law against the backdrop of several highly publicized charity-related scandals.  $^{62}$  Chinese leaders expressed hope that the law will help fight poverty  $^{63}$  and encourage charitable giving.  $^{64}$  Chinese experts have expressed hope that it may improve governance and transparency.  $^{65}$ 

Key provisions include the following:

- **Registration.** While observers noted that the Charity Law removes the requirement for charities to find a supervisory organization to register with civil affairs departments, <sup>66</sup> Article 20 defers the authority to stipulate specific registration management methods to the State Council. <sup>67</sup>
- Fundraising. Articles 22 and 23 permit registered charities to engage in public fundraising, including through radio, television, newspapers, and the Internet, after obtaining a public fundraising qualification certificate, which organizations can apply for after being lawfully registered for two years.<sup>68</sup>
- $\bullet$  **Transparency.** Articles 72 and 73 require organizations to publicly disclose information on the organization's charter, members, plans, activities, fundraising, and the use of funds.<sup>69</sup>
- **Preventing misconduct.** Provisions prohibit and provide punishment for embezzlement and misuse of funds, including revocation of registration, by any organization or individual associated with an organization.<sup>70</sup>

#### PRC Charity Law—Continued

International human rights organizations and media reports have highlighted concerns over certain provisions of the law, as follows:

- Endangering state security. Article 104 provides the legal basis for authorities to criminally prosecute and shut down groups deemed to "endanger state security," <sup>71</sup> a vague charge human rights groups say authorities can use to crack down on human rights advocacy <sup>72</sup> and limit sources of funding for independent groups. <sup>73</sup>
- **Registration.** One media report suggested that some charitable organizations may choose not to register due to authorities' suspicions regarding their activities.<sup>74</sup>
- **Implementation.** Some reports noted that while the law includes positive provisions, implementation at the local level will determine its impact on Chinese civil society groups.<sup>75</sup>
- Tax benefits. Articles 79 to 84 76 provide what experts worry are vaguely defined rules entitling beneficiaries, organizations, and donors to tax benefits. 77

# PRC Law on the Management of Overseas NGO Activities in Mainland China $^{78}$

On April 28, 2016, the National People's Congress (NPC) passed the PRC Law on the Management of Overseas NGO Activities in Mainland China, 79 scheduled to take effect on January 1, 2017, 80 after much deliberation and two drafts. 81 The final version of the law appeared to address some concerns expressed during the public comment process. 82 Revisions included more specificity in the definition of "overseas NGOs," 83 which an expert interpreted to encompass "industry and trade associations, chambers of commerce, [and] development and human rights NGOs . . ."; 84 allowing more than one representative office per organization in China; 85 and extending the length of time that a representative office's registration is valid. 86

International observers, nevertheless, continued to raise concerns with several of the new law's provisions, including:

• Registration authority given to Ministry of Public Security (MPS) and provincial-level public security offices. Whereas the Ministry of Civil Affairs has management authority over domestic NGOs,87 Article 41 authorizes public security officials to manage registration, conduct annual inspections, and investigate "illegal activities" of international NGOs (INGOs).88 Article 11 requires the formal consent of a government-approved professional supervisory unit (PSU) in order for INGOs to register with MPS.89 Articles 46 and 47 provide for public security officials—under specific conditions—to shut down INGO activities, confiscate property, detain INGO personnel, and criminally prosecute "illegal activities." 90

## PRC Law on the Management of Overseas NGO Activities in Mainland China—Continued 78

- Endangering national security. Article 5 prohibits INGOs from carrying out activities that "endanger China's national unity, security, [or] ethnic unity" or "harm China's national interests and the public interest . . .." <sup>91</sup> It also prohibits INGOs from engaging in or funding "for-profit" or "political" activities, as well as "illegally engaging in and funding religious activities." <sup>92</sup>
- Additional registration requirement. Article 9 requires that INGOs set up and register a representative office or, if they want to carry out temporary activities, they must "file a record according to law" (yi fa bei'an). 93 Foreign organizations that have not registered or "filed a record" are forbidden from funding or partnering with domestic NGOs. 94
- Restrictions on temporary activity. Articles 16 and 17 require INGOs without representative offices in China to partner with "Chinese partner units," which include state agencies, mass organizations, public institutions, or social organizations, in order to "file a record." <sup>95</sup> The duration of temporary activities is limited to one year, and extensions are dependent on making new filings. <sup>96</sup>
- **Reporting requirement.** Articles 19 and 31 require that representative offices of INGOs submit an annual activity plan for the following year by December 31 <sup>97</sup> and work reports on the previous year—including financial information, activities, and personnel and institutional changes—by January 31 to their PSUs for annual inspections by the relevant public security offices. <sup>98</sup>
- **Possible exemptions.** Article 53 provides ambiguous language for how "overseas schools, hospitals, science and engineering technology research institutions, and academic organizations" are treated under the law, and places them under the authority of "relevant national provisions." <sup>99</sup> Experts questioned whether this exempts these organizations from the provisions of the law. <sup>100</sup>

International observers called on the Chinese government to repeal the legislation, and warned that the law could be used as a tool of intimidation and suppression of dissenting views; <sup>101</sup> a mechanism for exerting greater control over civil society; <sup>102</sup> and an intensified effort to "stifle" groups in certain civil society sectors. <sup>103</sup> The U.S. Government expressed concern that the law may constrain U.S.-China people-to-people exchanges and relations. <sup>104</sup> A Chinese lawyer called the law a form of "national security legislation," and said it signaled a "fundamental change" in China's regulation of INGOs to a "national-security focused model" that discourages INGOs' "presence and activity." <sup>105</sup> A Chinese professor at Tsinghua University's School of Public Policy and Management cautioned that the concentration of approval authority and the new and complex approval process within the public security bureaucracy could result in a "stagnation effect" on INGO activity in China. <sup>106</sup>

### Other Regulatory Developments

During the past year, the Chinese government released plans and draft revisions to the three major regulations that pertain to the registration and management of civil society organizations as

part of a broad decision on revising regulations. 107 The Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) released revised drafts for public comment of all three regulations. 108 Following the February 2016 State Council administrative revision of the Regulations on the Registration and Management of Social Organizations, 109 the MCA released a revised draft of the same regulation for public comment in August 2016 which would permit direct registration for business associations, research organizations, charities, and service organizations. 110 Drafters changed the title of the Regulations on the Management of Non-Governmental, Non-Commercial Enterprises to Regulations on the Management of Social Service Organization Registration, renaming "non-governmental, non-commercial units" as "social service organizations." 111 Provisions in the draft Regulations on the Management of Foundations specify how charitable foundations should be classified and regulated. 112 In addition, Article 4 of all three draft regulations stipulates that Communist Party groups must be established within organizations. 113 In August 2016, the Party Central Committee and State Council jointly released an opinion on reforming social organization management, emphasizing the Party's leadership over civil society and setting 2020 as the target year for establishing a uniform registration and management system throughout the country. 114

#### Regulatory Environment

The regulatory environment for Chinese NGOs continues to be challenging to navigate. Authorities continue to require some NGOs to secure the sponsorship of a governmental or quasi-governmental organization in order to be eligible for registration at civil affairs bureaus. This "dual management system" for subjects NGOs to differentiated treatment based on authorities perception of a group's political sensitivity. Facing strict government control and barriers to registering as social organizations, many Chinese NGOs register instead as business entities or remain unregistered. Without registered status, NGOs have difficulty obtaining government funding or receiving donations from the private sector and often rely more heavily on international funding, which has become more difficult to secure in the new regulatory environment.

Experts noted that NGOs without government affiliation are at a disadvantage compared to quasi-governmental or government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs) with respect to public fundraising and government procurement. A 2014 China Academy of Social Sciences report highlighted GONGOs' monopoly over fundraising as one of the reasons independent NGOs receive little funding. According to a government official, government procurement of services may contribute to the uneven development of government-affiliated and grassroots NGOs. Amid the concern about the lack of a fair assessment mechanism for procurement, Ich in February 2016, officials in Chengdu municipality, Sichuan province, reportedly released the first guidelines in China for the evaluation of government procurement of public services.

#### Notes to Section III-Civil Society

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