

## Countering China's Global Transnational Repression Campaign

Testimony of Su Yutong  
Human rights advocate and Radio Free Asia journalist  
Congressional-Executive Commission on China  
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Mr. Chairman, members of the Commission, thank you for convening this meeting and inviting me to submit testimony.

As an individual who has faced incredible abuse at the hands of the Chinese government's crackdown on independent voices and journalists, I can speak first-hand about my experiences and the treatment I have had to endure as a journalist, as an activist, and as a woman. Despite living outside of China, beyond its borders, I am still threatened and harassed by authorities – often with serious and harmful consequences. This relentless campaign that I have suffered is designed to scare and silence me.. But it is obvious that the same people who work to make my life a living misery are scared too. They fear me and people like me, who use our voices to draw attention to wrongdoing in a country that wishes to keep its people in the dark.

I was born in Beijing. Early on, while still in China, I became an internet activist. Because my work was critical of China's human rights record, I was frequently placed under house arrest and invited for "chats" with the police. On June 3, 2010, I posted the diary of former Chinese Premier Li Peng on the internet, which details the suppression of the 1989 Tiananmen student demonstrations by the CCP authorities. As a result, my home was raided by the Chinese police, my belongings were confiscated and I was put under house arrest<sup>1</sup>. With the help of activists and human rights lawyers I managed to escape to Hong Kong.

Once in Hong Kong, I started working as a journalist with the German news agency Deutsche Welle. With the help of the former human rights officer at the German embassy in China, I secured a German visa at the German consulate in Hong Kong. On August 11, 2010, I arrived in Germany, where I continued working for the Chinese department of Deutsche Welle. I wrote and published nearly 1,500 articles.

Simultaneously with my work as a journalist, I continued with my work as an activist. In 2011, after the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei was secretly detained by the Chinese police, I launched a solidarity campaign on social media. At that time, there was a Chinese-run website in Germany, called Anti-CNN. They published a photoshopped nude photo claiming it was me, and described me as Ai Weiwei's mistress.

From that point on, I became a target of continuous harassment by the Chinese government.

In July of 2014, a fellow journalist Frank Sieren at Deutsche Welle published an article in German and Chinese, in which he described Tiananmen Massacre as "a slip-up by the CCP." The piece sparked a public outcry from a number of pro-democracy activists and massacre survivors. I was a signatory to an

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<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2012/05/china-for-activists-the-internet-is-like-dancing-in-shackles/>

open letter protesting this article and spoke out against the article on Twitter. On August 19 2014, I was fired<sup>2</sup> by Deutsche Welle for doing so.

During this time and after, I was regularly smeared by the official Chinese media. In August 2014, the Chinese official media Global Times published two articles calling me an anti-China reporter. This put an extraordinary amount of pressure on my family in China, who worried that these attacks forecast their own mistreatment. Chinese Communist Party authorities did not limit their campaign to traditional media only. They spread rumors about me on Twitter (now known as X) and other social media platforms, too. The insults ranged from calling me a prostitute, to being a German “dog”; I received death and rape threats, as well as anonymous messages stating they would kill me and my whole family. Sometimes, these messages were accompanied by extremely violent videos. CCP authorities also attempted to bribe me: unknown people have sent me messages promising me money if I stop my work, even offering me a passport to return to China. Threats and harassment of my family have continued.

In November 2014, Beijing State Security called me directly, asking me not to participate in the protests in Germany. The official insisted that, if I stopped protesting, he could be helpful in securing a chance to see my parents again. Although I am a Chinese citizen, I have no right to go back to my country. The State Security used my family to blackmail me into compliance.

In 2016, I joined Radio Free Asia as a reporter, covering a variety of issues, including human rights abuses within and without China. The harassment continued. In May 2018, someone sent me a private message on Twitter from a Chinese number, threatening to kill me and my whole family. Deciding that I needed to do something, I reported this threat to German authorities – making this instance the first time I had done so. Because it came from China, I reported the threat to the diplomat in charge of Chinese affairs of the German Foreign Ministry.

I lived in relative peace until June 2022. Around that time, threats and harassment became more frequent and persistent. On June 4, 2022, I participated in a protest in front of the Chinese embassy in Germany, in support of Hong Kong after Beijing’s national security laws had been put in place, completely changing its media and political landscape. A Chinese man arrived at the scene, and I later learned his name was “Zhu Kenan.” He took our photos and followed us. On the night of June 4th, he sent me a message via Telegram. He warned me against criticizing the Chinese government. When I asked him to stop texting me, he responded by posting a photoshopped nude photo of me that had first appeared in 2011, circulated on social media and the internet. I told him I would call the police. But his threats didn’t stop online. He started following me in real life.

Later, I found out that a Hong Kong activist was also threatened and followed by the same man. We reported the case to German police in Berlin on June 6, 2022. The case was later transferred to Germany’s State Criminal Police Office, or Landeskriminalamt (LKA), for investigation. But unfortunately, in July last year, the investigation was suspended because Zhu Kenan left Germany and returned to China. In August he sent me a message via Twitter, saying that he was going to Beijing and wanted to

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<sup>2</sup> New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/22/world/europe/german-broadcaster-fires-chinese-blogger.html>

RSF: <https://rsf.org/en/beijing-imposes-its-propaganda-beyond-its-borders>

Der Spiegel: <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/deutsche-welle-streit-um-twitter-nachricht-zu-tiananmen-massaker-a-987085.html>

visit my parents' house. When he sent this message, I learned that my parents and relatives were threatened by Chinese police and national security.

In June 2022, different men rang the doorbell at my apartment every night, saying they were responding to a sex advertisement they had seen online. I told them that I was not a sex worker and I asked how they got my address and information. Some of them told me my information was posted on an underground porn website.

These incidents continued throughout the summer. The last such incident was on August 20th, when I found a strange man waiting outside my apartment door. When I threatened to call the police, he left in a hurry. In October last year, I started to report on Chinese overseas police stations threatening dissidents in Europe; on November 22, I accompanied Chinese dissident Wang Jingyu in the Netherlands to report his case to the Berlin police station. Following my reporting on this issue, unknown people booked two hotel rooms in Berlin under my name, and I reported it to German police.

Beginning on November 25, 2022, a man named Yilisen Aierken began to send me threatening and harassing messages. He said he would rape and kill me. He said there was a group that works for CCP in Europe, and the people in this group knew my address. He also said they had published my photos, name and information on porn sites. Yilisen Aierken continued sending me threatening messages until January, when the messages abruptly stopped. On the evening of February 11, unknown persons booked many luxury hotel rooms under my name in Hong Kong, Macau, New York, Houston, Los Angeles, Istanbul and other cities, and reported false bomb threats. I kept getting calls from the police everywhere<sup>3</sup>.

At the advice of the police, I left my apartment in Berlin and stayed with friends for three months, unable to go home. During this period, I have also received messages offering bribes to quit my work, which I reported to the police. There was nothing they could do, they informed me, because offering money to someone is not a crime.

On June 16, 2023, I received a terrifying video from an unknown person in my Telegram of a person being dismembered. When I saw this video, I became physically sick. The unknown person also said that my head would be chopped off. On June 20, I participated in a protest in front of the German Chancellery, and I discovered that Chinese embassy staff and CCP agents monitored and secretly photographed the protesters.

At the end of June, my parents and relatives in China were threatened by Chinese police and state security. They told my parents that I participated in anti-China activities and smeared China. They called me a criminal. Since the beginning of August, many newspapers and TV stations in Germany have reported the threats to me by Chinese overseas police stations.

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<sup>3</sup> AXIOS: <https://www.axios.com/2023/03/29/chinese-activists-false-bomb-threats>  
RFA: <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/harassment-03202023133743.html>

Chinese diplomats stationed in Germany monitored and secretly photographed Chinese protesters in Germany. After that, I suffered more serious online smears than ever before. Unknown people spread rumors and posted photoshopped nude photos on Twitter and other social media every day to humiliate me. They also insinuated that I have actually taken money from the Chinese government to discredit me in the eyes of other activists<sup>4</sup>.

I have lived with these threats and rumors for 12 years now. While the police protection helps me feel somewhat safer, those who harass me are still free. While many of my harassers are anonymous, some of them are known to the law enforcement yet nothing is being done.

Despite leaving China, I live under threat every day. Despite my personal pride and refusing to admit it, even to myself, I have been afraid. Authorities in Germany have been helpful. But it's unclear what power they have, given that this form of harassment – crossing borders, crossing continents, and time zones – can target me, my loved ones, my friends, and my fellow journalists and activists at any given time, without warning. We don't have a recourse and they are allowed to continue doing it with impunity.

We can be living in places where human dignity is respected by the law, with strong civil societies, and be subject to the whims of a society that cares little for those things in pursuit of its own wish to bury the truth, no matter the cost. I have dedicated my life to lifting up the voices of others, so they can be heard. I want the world to know my story – and the stories of others like me – who dare to speak truth to power, and still feel the force of reprisal no matter where we choose to live. My only consolation, however seemingly small, is that the people and government behind this campaign are also afraid. The intensity of their threats and harassment mirrors their own fear.

Thank you.

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<sup>4</sup> Women in Journalism: <https://www.womeninjournalism.org/threats-all/germany-cfwij-calls-on-german-authorities-to-investigate-continuous-attacks-on-su-yutong>