

Beat: Arts

Detained Chinese human rights activist Cao Shunli dies

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USPA News - Chinese human rights activist Cao Shunli died at a military hospital in Beijing on Friday after she was reportedly denied medical treatment, according to a rights group. Cao died at Beijing No.

309 Military Hospital on Friday morning, only an hour after her family was informed of her worsening condition, according to the U.S.-based advocacy group the Chinese Human Rights Defenders (CHRD). "We mourn the loss of a stalwart defender of human rights and a friend," said CHRD international director Renee Xia. "The death of Cao Shunli is the saddest yet clearest example of the Chinese government's unbridled and rampant persecution of civil society activists and human rights defenders that seek participation in UN human rights activities." Police had detained Cao since September 14, 2013, when she was taken into custody at Beijing Capital International Airport. At the time, she was attempting to travel from China to Geneva for a UN Human Rights Council review and a training session of UN human rights mechanisms. Authorities placed Cao under criminal detention for "unlawful assembly" and later arrested her for "creating a disturbance." According to CHRD, Shunli's health seriously deteriorated during the five months she spent at the Chaoyang District Detention Center in Beijing, but officials refused to allow her to receive medical attention. She reportedly developed tuberculosis, liver ascites, fibroid tumors and cysts while at the detention center. Cao was rushed to the intensive-care unit (ICU) of Beijing's Qinghe Emergency Center on February 17. Three days later, Cao was transported from that location to 309 Military Hospital in Beijing where she remained until the time of her death, suffering from organ failure. CHRD claimed to have documented evidence of the Chinese governments' alleged role in "disappearing, arbitrarily detaining, and torturing or inhumanely treating Cao Shunli by denying her medical treatment in detention, which directly led to her death" and demanded that the government allow an independent investigation into Cao's death to take place. A spokesman for Britain's Foreign Office expressed its sadness over Cao's death and called on China to allow detainees to have access to proper medical attention. "We are saddened to hear that Chinese human rights activist Cao Shunli had died in detention, after she was reportedly denied medical treatment for serious illness," he said. The spokesman added: "Members of the Human Rights Council are bound to uphold and promote the highest standards of human rights. We strongly urge the Chinese authorities to ensure all detainees have access to adequate medical care, and to release all those detained for exercising their constitutional rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly." Cao was a powerful voice in China's human rights movement. Cao persistently advocated for civil society participation at the national level in both the 2009 and 2013 Universal Periodic Reviews at the United Nation's Human Rights Council. She also advocated for the government disclosure of materials about the Universal Periodic Review and the inclusion of the views of petitioners in drafting China's national human rights report for UPR. Cao was also responsible for helping to host several peaceful rallies of up to 200 activists in front of government buildings in Beijing in 2013.

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:

United Press Association, Inc.
3651 Lindell Road, Suite D168
Las Vegas, NV 89103, USA
(702) 943.0321 Local
(702) 943.0233 Facsimile
info@unitedpressassociation.org
info@gna24.com
www.gna24.com