

PRESS RELEASE

The CCBE Human Rights Award

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The Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE) today granted its 2015 Human Rights Award to Mr Intigam Aliyev, an Azerbaijani human rights lawyer and due to the recent crackdowns on human rights lawyers in China, decided to grant a second award to the Chinese law firm, Fengrui.

At its Extraordinary Plenary Session in Vienna, the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE) granted its 2015 Human Rights Award to Mr Intigam Aliyev, an Azerbaijani human rights lawyer who has devoted his life to protecting the rights of individuals against the repressive system of the Azerbaijani government. Intigam Aliyev has provided legal assistance and representation to the politically persecuted for decades.

In April 2015, Mr Aliyev was sentenced to seven and a half years in prison, and a three year ban from certain positions and activities, after being found guilty on the charges of misappropriation, illegal business by an organised group, tax evasion, abuse of official power, and falsifying data in official documents. Despite international mobilisation, Mr Aliyev still remains in custody.

Mr Aliyev's children were present at the ceremony in Vienna to receive the award.

The CCBE exceptionally granted a **second CCBE Human Rights Award to the Chinese Law Firm Fengrui**, a law firm which was particularly targeted by the attacks on human rights defenders which took place in July 2015 even smeared by official propaganda as a 'major criminal syndicate.'

On 9 July 2015, prominent Fengrui human rights lawyer Wang Yu, along with her husband Bao Longjun and their 16-year-old son, were detained by state officials. Over the next ten days, a total of at least 255 lawyers, law firm staff, and human rights defenders were detained, arrested, held incommunicado, summoned, or otherwise had their freedom temporarily restricted. As a result of the July 2015 crackdown, Fengrui law firm is currently not operating.

As of 20 January 2016, 15 lawyers, legal assistants and human rights activists have been formally arrested, including five Fengrui staff members (lawyers and legal assistants). Four of these Fengrui lawyers including Zhou Shifeng and Wang Yu have been charged with 'subversion of state power' which can carry a sentence of up to life in prison.

Due to the sensitive nature of the award, the firm has not been able to be notified of the award. However, Teng Biao, another Chinese human rights lawyer, currently residing in the United States, sent a video explaining the difficult situation that lawyers are facing in China.

About the CCBE:

The CCBE represents the bars and law societies of 32 member countries and 13 further associate and observer countries, and through them over one million European lawyers. Since 2007, the CCBE has annually granted its Human Rights Award to a lawyer or lawyers' organisation that has brought honour to the legal profession by upholding the highest values of professional and personal conduct in the field of human rights. More information about past recipients and criteria for the award is available [here](#).

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ANNEXE BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON WINNERS:

Mr Intigam Aliyev has filed hundreds of cases before the European Court of Human Rights, forty of which he won. He won cases concerning election rights, freedom of association, freedom of speech, property rights, and the right to a fair trial. Out of the 200 cases filed before the European Court, 43 were in connection to Azerbaijan's parliamentary elections of 2005 and 2010.

In addition to his accomplishments as a practitioner, Mr Aliyev has been extensively involved in a wide variety of human rights related activities throughout his career. He is a teacher, author, trainer, and has taken part in numerous international conferences, seminars and forums. As such, he has spoken out for the freedom of media and associations, the development of democracy, the protection of human rights, the fight against corruption, court and detention system's reforms, and the promotion of the rule of law. He spoke before the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in June 2014, criticising the Azerbaijani government's violation of its human rights obligations. He is an expert on law and human rights at the American Bar Association Rule of Law Initiative, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Council of Europe, the Netherlands Helsinki Committee, and the German Technical Cooperation Organisation. Most notably, he headed the Legal Education Society prior to his arrest, promoting awareness of the law through legislative reform monitoring, the organisation of legal training seminars for lawyers. He has also provided legal assistance to low-income and marginalized individuals, as well as legal and informational support to mass media and NGOs.

In August 2014, Mr Aliyev was arrested in Baku for tax evasion, illegal enterprise, and abuse of official power. His pre-trial detention was extended despite the deterioration of his health, due in part to conditions of his detention. He also faced restrictions of his private correspondence, with communications with his lawyers having been continuously monitored by the detention facility's employees. In addition, four out of the five lawyers representing him had been removed from the case.

Fengrui Law Firm was established in April 2007, and has headquarters in Beijing, Sichuan and around China. Fengrui is noted for its independent thinking. Its main expertise is criminal litigation, real estate and construction, but it also focuses on the impact of public interest litigation and legal aid on vulnerable citizens, and is dedicated to a modern civil society. In his introduction to the firm (on their website), Zhou Shifeng explains that, no matter how dangerous the environment for activist lawyers is, Fengrui's practitioners will keep on defending their clients.

Many of the detained were subject to harassment due to their peaceful human rights activities and advocacy campaigns, while also being portrayed as criminals by official media. Among the arrested were also over 100 lawyers and rights activists who signed a public statement on 9 July 2015 condemning the disappearance of lawyer Wang Yu. While most were subsequently released, around 30 human rights defenders, among which 15 lawyers and lawyers' assistants (including those from Fengrui Law Firm), still remain in custody. Around 10 staff members are still detained or missing, including Wang Yu and Zhou Shifeng. Several children of the lawyers have also been implicated in this affair; for instance, Bao Zhuoyuan, the son of Wang Yu, was taken away by police in Myanmar on the 6 October 2015. He was missing for six days before it was confirmed that he was under house arrest at his grandmother's home in Inner Mongolia.

Indeed, the law firm has taken on controversial civil society cases, including, for instance, those involving the dissident artist Ai Weiwei and Uighur scholar Ilham Tohti, as well as society's most vulnerable.

The CCBE continues its efforts in support of Chinese lawyers and to this effect, the CCBE co-signed a global petition initiated by the China Human Rights Lawyers Concern Group and Taiwan Support China Human Rights Lawyers Network, which called on the Chinese government to respect due process and uphold the rule of law, and to release the 36 illegally detained human rights lawyers and defenders. The petition was co-signed by 106 organisations worldwide. The CCBE President also co-signed a letter initiated by the organisation [ACAT](#) calling for the release of detained Chinese lawyers. The letter was signed by 20 prominent lawyers and high level personalities from the legal community. The letter had a large amount of media coverage.