



Joint statement: ICE arrests Chinese lawyer Wu Shaoping

29 July 2026

The Law Society of England and Wales, Lawyers for Lawyers, Asian Lawyers Network, International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute, and Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada are gravely concerned about the arrest of Chinese human rights lawyer Wu Shaoping by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) on 15 July 2026, and the serious risks surrounding his ongoing immigration proceedings and any potential deportation to China, which would violate the principle of non-refoulement.

Wu Shaoping fled China in late 2019 amidst an intensifying crackdown on human rights lawyers in the country. He travelled to the US on a tourist visa, where he made an asylum claim in 2020, for which he is still awaiting a decision. Unable to continue his legal practice in exile, Mr Wu has been working as an Amazon courier.

According to Mr Wu's lawyer, on 15 July 2026, Wu Shaoping was delivering parcels in the Mount Holly Springs borough in Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, when he was stopped by a police officer and asked to provide proof of his citizenship. In response, Mr Wu presented proof of his pending asylum application and his employment authorisation document¹ and explained that he had entered the country legally. Despite this, the police notified ICE officers, who detained Mr Wu and brought him to the Moshannon Valley Processing Centre in Pennsylvania, where he was held in immigration detention. According to credible sources, Mr Wu's application for release on bail has since been granted, and he has been released upon payment of USD 1,500. However, the immigration proceedings against him remain ongoing.

A spokeswoman for the Department of Homeland Security has stated that Wu Shaoping lacks legal status and has overstayed his visa by six years, and that he will receive full due process. However, Mr Wu's lawyer maintains that because Mr Wu had applied for asylum before his tourist visa expired, he is shielded from deportation and authorised to stay while his application was pending.²

Wu Shaoping originally worked as a commercial lawyer in Shanghai but became more involved in human rights defence following the intense repression of human rights lawyers that began on 9 July 2015, known as the '709 crackdown', which saw over 300 legal professionals detained, interrogated or disappeared.³ Mr Wu began to take on more politically sensitive cases defending activists and human rights defenders. According to

¹An employment authorisation document is a work permit issued by the US state allowing eligible foreign nationals without legal permanent resident status to work legally in the US. While Mr Wu holds this document, it means he is legally allowed to remain and work during its validity period.

² [Chinese Human Rights Lawyer Seeking Asylum Is Arrested by ICE - The New York Times](#)

³ [China: 10 Years Since '709 Crackdown,' Lawyers Still Under Fire | Human Rights Watch](#)

Mr Wu's wife, Caoliu Li, he had been subjected to questioning and harassment by Chinese authorities over the years but remained dedicated to defending human rights.

In December 2019, Mr Wu attended a dinner with fellow lawyers and human rights defenders in Xiamen, now known as the 'Xiamen gathering'. In retaliation for the gathering, Chinese authorities cracked down on the attendees, most notably subjecting human rights lawyer Ding Jiaxi and legal scholar Xu Zhiyong to arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment under Residential Surveillance at a Designated Location (RSDL), a form of secret detention widely criticised as amounting to enforced disappearance. They were subsequently tried behind closed doors sentenced to 12 and 14 years in prison respectively for "subverting state power."⁴ As a result of the reprisals against other attendees of the Xiamen meeting, Mr Wu was forced to flee China.

Given this context, our organisations are extremely concerned that the ongoing immigration proceedings against Wu Shaoping could ultimately result in his deportation to China where he would risk facing reprisals in retaliation for his human rights work and attendance of the 'Xiamen gathering', as proven by the treatment of Ding Jiaxi, Xu Zhiyong, and numerous other lawyers in China.

His forcible repatriation to China would violate the principle of non-refoulement as outlined in Article 3 of the United Nations Convention against Torture (UNCAT), Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the Refugee Convention.⁵ This principle guarantees that no one should be returned to a country where they would in danger of being subjected to torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, enforced disappearance, or other irreparable harm. Reflecting the importance of this principle to international protection it is also considered to be a norm of customary law.

As a state party to the UNCAT and ICCPR, and in accordance with customary law, the US has an international legal obligation not to deport Wu Shaoping to China as this would put him at severe risk of persecution, torture, or other irreparable harm.

Furthermore, the US has incorporated a form of the principle of non-refoulement into their domestic law through 'Withholding of Removal' under the Refugee Act of 1980 (Section 241(b)(3)).⁶ Under this legislation, if an applicant can establish that there is clear probability that their life or freedom would be threatened in the proposed country of deportation on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, they should not be deported to that country. Our organisations maintain that given the well documented persecution and abuse of human rights lawyers like Wu Shaoping in China, Mr Wu more than satisfies this requirement.

In addition to the protection under the principle of non-refoulement, our organisations support the view of Mr Wu's lawyer that because Mr Wu had applied for asylum before his tourist visa expired and therefore has not overstayed his visa as claimed by the

⁴ [China: Five years on, activists jailed in 'cruel' 2019 crackdown must be released - Amnesty International](#)

⁵ The US is not a state party to the 1951 Refugee Convention because the original treaty applied to those who became refugees in Europe prior to 1 January 1951. However, the US acceded to the 1967 Protocol which made the core protections in the convention globally applicable.

⁶ [Refugee Act of 1980 \(Section 241\(b\)\(3\)\)](#)

Department of Homeland Security, he is shielded from deportation and authorised to stay while his application is pending.

In light of the above, our organisations urge the competent US authorities to:

- Ensure that Wu Shaoping remains protected against deportation or any other form of forced return to China, in line with the principle of non-refoulement under international human rights standards and domestic US law.
- Ensure that Wu Shaoping's fair trial rights are fulfilled during the immigration proceedings against him, in line with international human rights standards.
- Guarantee that when considering Wu Shaoping's asylum application, due weight will be given to the broader context for human rights lawyers in China and to the specific risks faced by Mr Wu.

Signatories:

The Law Society of England and Wales

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Asian Lawyers Network

International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada