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## NATO DEFENSE COLLEGE FOUNDATION

### STRATEGIC TRENDS

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#### CHINA

##### **China's authorities clamp down on human rights lawyers**

Over 200 lawyers and rights activists across China have signed an open letter to the National People's Congress (NPC) in the run-up to its annual session last month, calling for the immediate release of 19 human rights lawyers arrested last year after a nationwide police operation.

According to the letter's signatories "these lawyers were brave enough to take on sensitive cases and to fight them using rational argument, with respect and a sense of justice. Because of this, they were charged with subversion, or incitement to subvert state power, and even had their names smeared by reports in the People's Daily and Xinhua news agency."

The letter called for the immediate and unconditional release of all detained in the crackdown, which began with the arrest of human rights lawyer Wang Yu, her husband Bao Longjun and colleagues at a Beijing law firm on the night of 9 July, 2015.

The Hong Kong-based Chinese Human Rights Lawyers Concern Group claims that at least 317 lawyers, law firm staff, human right activists and family members have since been questioned, summoned, forbidden to leave the country, held under house arrest and residential surveillance, criminally detained,

placed under formal arrest or have simply gone missing. Most have been released but 19 still face subversion-related charges.

The open letter came after a delegate to the NPC's advisory body, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), told the Beijing News that the recent use of televised "confessions" by detained activists and other dissidents is prejudicing the judicial process.

There was of course no hope that the NPC's delegates would take any notice of the open letter as their role does not go beyond rubber stamping measures proposed by the powerful NPC standing committee. As a matter of fact, the delegates are frequently derided on social media for parading themselves in high-end designer suits and for falling asleep during speeches.

Meanwhile authorities in the Chinese capital had tightened security ahead of the annual NPC sessions in a bid to prevent a deluge of complaints and petitions. Several hundred petitioners were removed in city-wide security sweeps but several thousand remained gathered outside the State Council complaints office in Beijing, as petitioners called on the government to amend a set of rules forbidding them from taking complaints against local officials to high levels of government.

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