

Lee Ming-che to stand trial, wife says

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Lee Ching-yu, wife of Taiwanese human rights activist Lee Ming-che who is detained in China, speaks at a news conference in Taipei yesterday.

Photo: Wang Yi-sung, Taipei Times

Taiwanese human rights advocate Lee Ming-che (李明哲), who has been detained in China since March, is to stand trial soon, his wife, Lee Ching-yu (李靜瑜), said yesterday, adding that she is traveling to China to see him.

"I must see my husband, and I cannot wait to see him," Lee Ching-yu said.

She said she would apply for a new Taiwanese compatriot permit today after receiving a call yesterday from a man named Zhang Zhongwei (張宗偉), who said he was the court-appointed lawyer for her husband.

Lee Ming-che has been held incommunicado since entering China from Macau on March 19 on what his wife says was a mission to share Taiwan's experience with democratization.

Beijing arbitrarily canceled Lee Ching-yu's Taiwanese compatriot permit in April, forcing her to cancel a trip to China with Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) officials, to try to see her husband.

Lee Ching-yu said that Zhang had told her to begin applying for travel documents because her husband is to stand trial in the Intermediate People's Court in Yueyang City, Hunan Province.

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Zhang did not say when the trial would start, but promised to notify her when a date has been set.

She said she has not decided whether to ask SEF officials to accompany her again, but called on Taiwanese lawyers to join her.

Taiwan Association for Human Rights secretary-general Chiu Ee-ling (邱毅) said that the Mainland Affairs Council yesterday called to offer its assistance.

Beijing's refusal to abide by the terms of the Cross-Strait Joint Crime-Fighting and Judicial Mutual Assistance Agreement (《海峡两岸刑事司法互助協議》) and directly contact Taipei over the case has been a major point of contention.

Lee Ching-yu said that she did not ask Zhang for proof of identity, but added that he appeared to be a Chinese Communist Party branch secretary and had represented Yueyang at the 7th National People's Congress.

It is important that Lee Ching-yu be accompanied by Taiwanese lawyers, because there is a danger that Chinese authorities could use her to pressure her husband to confess, Judicial Reform Foundation executive secretary Hsiao Yi-ming (蕭義明) said.

"If he had confessed, there should be a public video at this point," Hsiao said.

"Lee Ming-che has already disappeared — we do not want Lee Ching-yu to be next," he said.

Chinese human rights lawyer Jiang Xianyong (江天勇), whose sentencing was broadcast last month over social media, appears to have confessed after his father disappeared, he said.

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The Judicial Reform Foundation will send representatives to accompany Lee Ching-yu, he said, calling on the Chinese government to allow them to be present for the trial, that all evidence against Lee Ming-che be presented openly and for him to have the opportunity to rebut accusations.

Lee Ming-che may be the first Taiwanese to stand trial on charges of attempting to overthrow the Chinese government, which carries a potential life sentence, Hsiao said, adding that the Chinese government's failure to contact his immediate family members after his arrest violated China's own laws.

"China's intention is clearly aimed at disrupting our plans to take the case to the UN," Chiu said, referring to Lee Ching-yu's scheduled appearance next week before the UN Human Rights Council's Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances.

Lee Ching-yu said that she was unsure if she would be able to attend the UN hearing.

Chiu said her group and Covent Watch would send representatives to the hearing to assist in presenting evidence if they are barred from using their Republic of China (ROC) passports.

The Presidential Office said it was the government's duty to protect Lee Ming-che's safety and ensure his return under the condition that national dignity is maintained.

Lee Ming-che is an ROC citizen and it is the government's duty to protect him, Presidential Office spokesman Sidney Lin (林錫山) said.

The Mainland Affairs Council will provide necessary assistance, Lin said.

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