

# Chinese social justice activist 'disappeared'

*Li Qiaochu's last tweet: 'Let's go through the tough time together'.*

By Yaqiu Wang

HRW (11.03.2020) – <https://bit.ly/3dcZwS6> – Li Qiaochu, a Beijing-based women's rights and labor activist, tweeted on January 24 about the Chinese authorities' attempted coverup of the COVID-19 outbreak: "Wish everyone a peaceful [Lunar] New Year. Let's remember the pain... and the lives that left us without even being tallied... Let's use civic engagement to pursue those responsible for trampling lives."

Early on the morning of February 16, Beijing authorities took Li into custody. It is unclear where she is now and with what crime she has been charged.

Some international media have reported Li's enforced disappearance in relation to the recent arbitrary detention of her partner, Xu Zhiyong, a prominent and previously imprisoned legal activist. But what has often been overlooked is Li's own tireless work on social justice issues, and the repeated police harassment and intimidation she has endured.

During the freezing winter of 2017, when Beijing authorities

forcibly evicted tens of thousands of migrant workers from their homes during a citywide “clean-up campaign,” Li worked with other volunteers to find free or cheap housing for the newly homeless. Since 2018, she played an active role in China’s #MeToo movement, collecting cases of sexual harassment and publishing reports online.

As the coronavirus crisis unfolded, Li joined a volunteer team that handed out free masks to sanitation workers in Beijing. She also helped pregnant women in quarantine areas to find doctors, and organized volunteers to help those who suffered domestic violence – instances of which rose markedly while households across the country were under quarantine or other forms of restriction.

“Let’s go through the tough time together.” This is the last tweet Li posted before her disappearance, in reply to a tweet by Luo Shengchun, the wife of the arbitrarily detained human rights lawyer Ding Jiaxi. In the past several years, despite the government of Xi Jinping’s ever-tightening grip on civil society, countless people have chosen to embrace one of China’s toughest life paths – challenging the powerful authoritarian government. Let’s remember the pain they endure in the struggle for human rights in China.