

SERBIA **VS** (UN)FRIENDLY TIES OF STEEL **FALUN GONG**



Unlawful Detention of Falun Gong Practitioners during the Visit of the
Chinese President to Serbia in May 2024

SUMMARY



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IMPRESSUM

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I INTRODUCTION

A Person Under International Protection

In May 2024, eight Serbian citizens, mostly members of the spiritual group Falun Gong, which has faced persecution since 1999, were summoned for police interviews as part of preliminary proceedings concerning the criminal offence of endangering a person under international protection. The summons, issued on the day of [Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Serbia](#), was delivered by police officers who demanded that the individuals immediately accompany them to the premises of the Ministry of the Interior at the Palace of Serbia. There, they were served detention orders issued by the Counter Terrorism Department of the Criminal Police Directorate. The stated reason for detention was “the existence of a reasonable suspicion that they had committed the criminal offence of endangering a person under international protection”. The Falun Gong practitioners, along with two of their family members, were held in police custody for 48 hours and released on the evening of 8 May, after President Xi's departure from Belgrade to Budapest.

This was not the first time that Falun Gong practitioners in Serbia were detained on the eve of high-ranking Chinese officials' visits to Belgrade. Their persecution started a decade earlier, [in December 2014](#), coinciding with the deepening of relations between Serbia and China. That year, 11 members of the group from various European countries were first detained in Belgrade and subsequently deported from Serbia. The association “The Society of Serbian-Chinese Friendship” had previously notified the Ministry of the Interior of public gatherings planned in Belgrade for 15, 16, 17, and 18 December, but the Ministry prohibited them.

A similar scenario occurred in June 2016, when the Ministry of the Interior once again prohibited a Falun Gong gathering, which was also planned to take place on the eve of the Chinese President's to Serbia. A comparable situation took place in 2018, when several gatherings in Belgrade and other towns across Serbia, of which the police had been duly notified, were also banned. All prohibition decisions issued by the Ministry of the Interior in 2018 cited the same justification: the potential for conflict between citizens of the People's Republic of China residing in Serbia and Falun Gong supporters, whereby “the security of people and property at the aforementioned locations would be endangered”. In April 2024, the Constitutional Court of Serbia upheld a constitutional complaint filed by the Committee of Lawyers for Human Rights (YUKOM) on behalf of the Society of Serbian-Chinese Friendship. The Court found that the decision of the Ministry of the Interior from February 2018, as well as the ruling of the Administrative Court from November 2019, constituted a violation of the association's right to freedom of assembly, as guaranteed by Article 54 of the Constitution of Serbia. In 2020, YUKOM submitted an application to the European Court for Human Rights on behalf of this association, challenging the Constitutional Court's ruling of May 2020, which had rejected the constitutional complaint against the Ministry of the Interior's decision of 5 March 2018. The application alleged violations of the right to effective legal remedy and the right of freedom of assembly.

In May 2024, Falun Gong practitioners in Serbia did not plan any activities, nor did they submit a notification of a public gathering to the police in connection with the visit of Chinese President to Belgrade. At the time of their arrest, on the afternoon of 7 May, they were either at home or outside taking a walk. In conversation with them, we learned that, in some cases, police officers came to their homes;

[1] The Youth Initiative for Human Rights had access to all documentation.

others were approached in a shopping mall, while some believe they had been followed throughout the day by plainclothes officers monitoring their movements and the buildings they reside in.

The report *Serbia vs Falun Gong: (Un)Friendly Ties of Steel – Unlawful Detention of Falun Gong Practitioners during the Visit of the Chinese President to Serbia in May 2024* confirms that members of this group were unlawfully deprived of liberty and that the entire procedure was unlawful and fraught with deficiencies, spanning the arrest, detention and release processes. This conclusion is further supported by the fact that, to date, none of the eight individuals detained has received any information about their case, nor have they been contacted by either the police or Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in that regard.

This report is based on research interviews conducted by the Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR) with Falun Gong practitioners who were detained in May 2024, as well as an analysis of legal and legislative framework of the Republic of Serbia and a review of previous treatment of Falun Gong practitioners in the country. It also provides a detailed overview of the context in which these individuals have been subjected to persecution in Serbia from 2014 to the present. In addition, the report refers to numerous official documents issued by international organisations and governments of Western European countries calling on China to immediately end the persecution of Falun Gong members, to respect and protect human rights, and to comply with its obligations under international law.

The report, along with past practice, clearly demonstrates that Falun Gong practitioners in Serbia are victims of the Belgrade authorities' efforts, ongoing for over a decade, to foster favourable relations with the Chinese government, which has been systematically violating the human rights of Falun Gong practitioners across China since 1999. It is also evident that a group of eight individuals, most of whom are of advanced age, posed no threat to the person under international protection at the time of their detention. This is further confirmed by the fact that the Public Prosecutor's Office failed to provide any evidence against the Falun Gong practitioners in its detention order, despite being legally required to do so.

The report also includes recommendations addressed to the institutions of the Republic of Serbia, primarily the Ministry of the Interior, the State Prosecutor's Office, the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, and the Ombudsman, as well as to international institutions, including the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council.

The aim of these recommendations is to ensure respect for the guaranteed human rights of Falun Gong members and to bring an end to the unfounded and politically motivated targeting of this group.

“Serbia has acquired its fourth pillar – Beijing”

The persecution of Falun Gong practitioners in Serbia cannot be viewed in isolation from the broader context, with the strengthening of Belgrade–Beijing relations at its core, especially from 2014 to the present.

Although diplomatic relations between Serbia, then the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia (FNRJ), and the People’s Republic of China were officially established on 2 January 1955, a key turning point came in 2009, when, during a visit to China, Serbian President Boris Tadić announced the establishment of a strategic partnership between the two states. Speaking to the media in Beijing on 20 August 2009, Tadić stated that, through the signing of the Agreement on Strategic Cooperation, China would become Serbia’s key partner in Asia, and called on Chinese companies to invest in Serbia. “I would particularly like to emphasise that Serbia had three foreign policy pillars in previous years – Brussels, Washington, and Moscow. It is now my pleasure to confirm that Serbia has acquired its fourth pillar – Beijing”, Tadić said on that occasion.

In the years that followed, mutual visits by high-ranking officials, including, notably, presidents, became increasingly frequent, accompanied by the signing of numerous agreements. Gradually but steadily, China expanded its presence to other Balkan countries as well, while Chinese companies took over major infrastructure and construction projects throughout Serbia.

Relations between Serbia and China deepened further in 2013 and were officially elevated to the level of a strategic partnership in 2016. During this period, Serbia became part of key initiatives launched by the Chinese government, including the Belt and Road Initiative and the 16+1 platform, a sort of regional economic and political framework for China’s cooperation with 16 Central and Eastern European countries. In December 2014, Belgrade even hosted the 16+1 Summit.

Alongside Russia, China has remained a staunch supporter of the Serbian regime as one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council.

At the time of intensification of relations with China, Serbia was governed by the Serbian Progressive Party. Tomislav Nikolić served as President of Serbia, while Aleksandar Vučić held the position of First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence in the government led by Ivica Dačić, and subsequently served as Prime Minister from 2014 to 2016. It is under the rule of the Serbian Progressive Party that bilateral relations between Serbia and China reached their peak, with the strengthening of cooperation accompanied by growing public expressions of support for official Beijing and increasingly anti-Western narrative promoted by Serbian officials and echoed by pro-government media. During his 2016 visit to Serbia, Chinese President was awarded the Order of the Republic of Serbia, 1st class. Notably, on 8 May 2024, while Falun Gong practitioners were in detention, Aleksandar Vučić and Xi Jinping signed a Joint Statement on deepening and elevating the comprehensive strategic partnership and building a Serbia-China community with a shared future in the new era, along with 28 cooperation documents.

In the domestic public sphere, China is most often mentioned in the context of foreign direct investments, although domestic authorities and media rarely distinguish between loans and actual investments. Criticism of Serbia's relationship with China is ongoing, not only within the country, but also at the international level. Chinese companies are regularly accused of human rights violations, especially breaches of labour rights, environmental degradation, and operating non-transparently without the required permits. Furthermore, Serbia-China relations are often described as debt trap diplomacy. Supporting this view is the fact that, by the end of 2024, Serbia's debt to the Chinese Export-Import bank totalled EUR 2.75 billion across 14 projects, with an additional EUR 104.6 million owed to the Hungarian branch of the Bank of China.

The privileged relationship and clear affinity of official Belgrade towards Beijing came under renewed public scrutiny following the collapse of the canopy at the Novi Sad railway station on 1 November 2024, which resulted in the loss of 16 lives. The reconstruction of the station had been carried out by the Chinese state-owned companies China Railway International and China Communications Construction Company, as part of a project contracted under the Belt, Road Initiative. According to media reports, the Chinese consortium was awarded the contract without a public tender.

Relations between Belgrade and Beijing were also addressed in the resolution on Serbia adopted by the European Parliament in early May 2024. The document states that Serbia remains at the epicentre of the spread of foreign disinformation campaigns, especially by Russia and China, which are aimed at creating anti-Western rhetoric. The European Parliament also expressed concern over Russian and Chinese investments in Serbia, citing in particular their lack of transparency, negative environmental impact, and the growing influence of these two countries on political and economic processes in the region.

Despite criticism both domestically and internationally, the Serbian government continues to firmly rely on its fourth foreign policy pillar, Beijing. For President Vučić and other Serbian officials, Xi is described as "a great friend of the Serbian people" and "a brother of this country", while the friendship between Belgrade and Beijing is "made of steel".

Long live the friendly ties of steel between Serbia and China, forged in difficult times and preserved through mutual respect, understanding, and steadfast support", said Vučić to the media on 8 May 2024, during the official reception of the Chinese delegation at the Belgrade airport.

Yet, while Xi was welcomed with the highest state honours on that warm May evening, eight Serbian citizens, Falun Gong practitioners and their family members, were being held in detention facilities across Belgrade, awaiting his departure.

III **FALUN GONG**

“A coordinated, global response to China’s campaign against Falun Gong practitioners is long overdue”

Falun Gong is a spiritual discipline that emerged in China in 1992. It is considered by many to represent a revitalisation of traditional Chinese culture. Also known as Falun Dafa, Falun Gong was founded by Li Hongzhi, then a commercial specialist from Changchun in northeast China. On 13 May 1992, he introduced this **ancient Chinese spiritual practice** to the public, rooted in the Buddha-school tradition. Falun Gong combines ethical teachings with meditation and slow-moving exercises believed to improve health and increase energy levels.

Since 1999, Falun Gong practitioners have been subjected to persecution and attacks by the Chinese government, primarily due to the movement’s rapid growth and the fact that this is an independent group outside state control. According to the Chinese government estimates, by 1999 the group had 100 million followers across the country. The persecutions intensified after 25 April 1999, when more than 10,000 Falun Gong practitioners held a peaceful gathering outside the headquarters of the Communist Party of China in Beijing. Following this protest, thousands were detained, tortured, and sent to labour camps, while the group was subsequently banned and officially labelled an “evil culture” by the Communist Party of China.

According to a 2002 report by Human Rights Watch (HRW), the Chinese government sought to suppress this group in an “aggressive and often violent” manner. HRW noted that the persecution of Falun Gong formed part of a broader tightening of control over individuals and organisations whose activities were perceived as threatening to the Communist Party of China.

“The crackdown on Falun Gong is both symptomatic of the larger trend and significant in its own right for the vehemence with which the authorities have moved to eradicate the organisation and reeducate its members”, the report stated.

Even 26 years later, Falun Gong supporters continue to be targeted by the Chinese authorities. For this reason, many states and international organisations have called on the authorities in Beijing to end the repression and to respect the rights of all individuals and groups, including human rights defenders and minorities such as Uyghurs and Tibetans.

On 18 January 2024, the European Parliament adopted a **resolution on the ongoing persecution of Falun Gong** in China, with particular reference to the case of Ding Yuand, a practitioner sentenced to three years’ imprisonment. The European Parliament called on China to cease its persecution of Falun Gong practitioners and other minorities, to immediately release Yuand and all other detained members of this group in China, to respect and uphold human rights, and to comply fully with its obligations under international law.

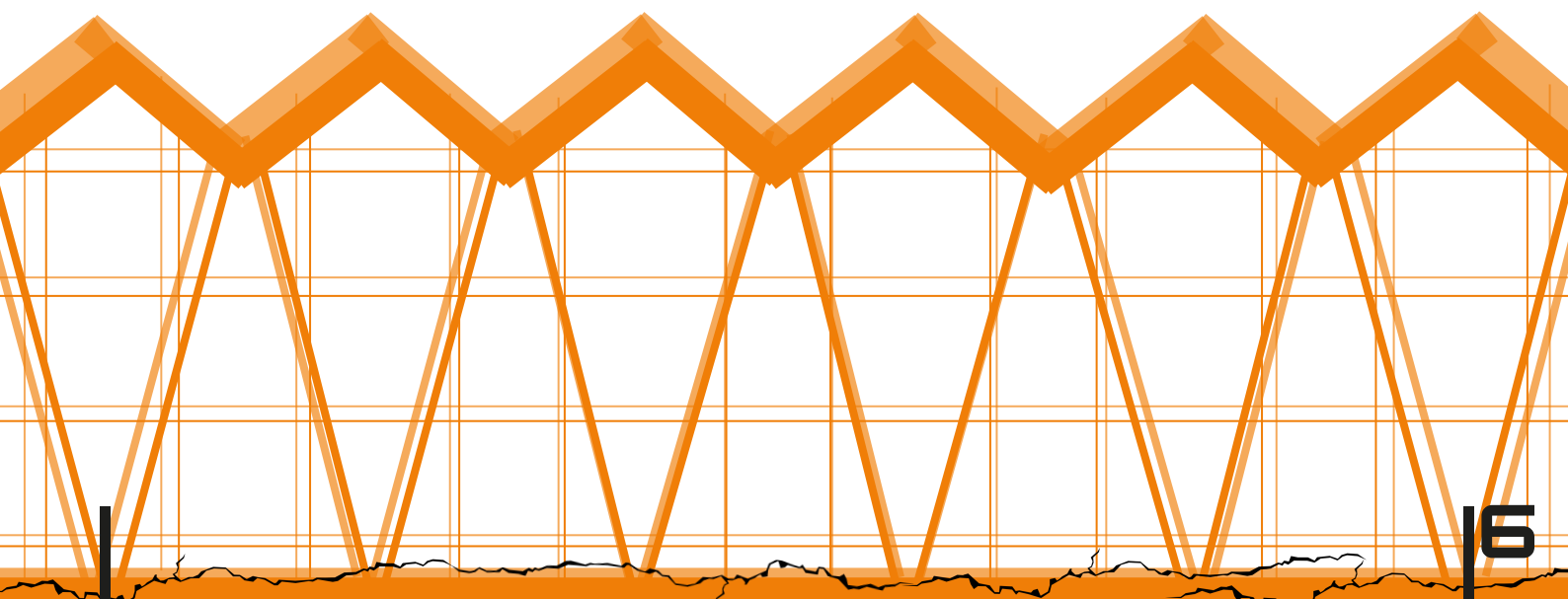
The resolution also addressed the institutions of the European Union and its Member States, urging them to suspend extradition agreements with China, to support and facilitate an international investigation into the persecution of Falun Gong supporters, and to raise the issue of persecution of religious groups in meetings with Chinese officials.

A month later, the non-governmental organisation **Society for Threatened Peoples** sent a letter to the UN Human Rights Council with similar demands, citing data indicating that at least 5,000 Falun Gong practitioners had been killed by 2023 and warning that this figure is likely only “a tip of the iceberg”.

“A coordinated, global response to China’s campaign against Falun Gong practitioners is long overdue”, the letter stated. Representatives of the Society for Threatened Peoples also addressed the repression of Falun Gong members at the **58th session of the UN Human Rights Council** on 4 March 2025.

Warnings have also been coming from the United States and Canada for years, as well. In several documented cases, Chinese agents, as well as citizens of China, attempted to influence US institutions in order to intimidate, sabotage, or silence Falun Gong communities legally operating in the country. In April 2025, a group of legislators from Virginia publicly called for a **stronger response by US institutions to China’s influence and for greater protection of Falun Gong practitioners**. Proposed measures included enhanced security, diplomatic pressure, and sanctions against Chinese officials responsible for the oppression of this community. In December 2024, Canada imposed **sanctions on eight Chinese officials**, including bans on financial transactions and the freezing of assets. These individuals were identified as being responsible for serious violations of human rights, including the persecution of Falun Gong members.

China and its allies, however – including its “steel friend” Serbia – remain unresponsive to warnings, demands and requests.



IV POLICE SUMMONS FOR INTERVIEWS

“Good evening, Olivera, we have a couple of questions for you” —

There are only ten practitioners of Falun Gong in Serbia. They occasionally gather to exercise, meditate, and raise public awareness across Serbia about their teachings.

Dejan Marković, one of detained Falun Gong practitioners, who has been in the organisation for 20 years, said in the YIHR research interview that until 2014, they had regularly organised peaceful protests and publicly talked about human rights violations in China.

“Until the current president [of Serbia] came to power, we never had any problems. We would notify the police about a gathering in front of the Chinese Embassy or at Republic square, and these were never an issue. There were usually more police officers than us. Across the street from the Chinese Embassy, we even played music, did exercises, held up banners, and all of that was fine. The first incident occurred in 2014, during the Chinese Summit, when the Prime Minister [of China] was here.”

Speaking to YIHR researchers in July 2024, Marković recounted that on 7 May, five police officers came to his door and ordered him to come with them. He was taken to the Criminal Police Directorate, where he saw his brother, who is not a member of the group.

Gordana Gosić, another Falun Gong practitioner, suspects that she and her husband were monitored for hours before being taken to the police.

I got a message from a colleague who said she’d been arrested and taken in for questioning, so I knew they were coming. Less than ten minutes after that, I went to take a shower and that’s when I heard the doorbell. At the same time, my husband’s phone rang. It was a police inspector calling him, even though he has nothing to do with any of this. They asked him to come to the local bakery so they could ‘give him something’. My husband left, and as he was going, he saw them behind the building, then near the tennis courts, and then again near the bakery. Our neighbours later told us they had been there for two hours before ringing the doorbell, listening to what we were saying and following us. We had no idea. And then, seven of them came back with him, in three vehicles, and handed us two pieces of paper”.

Some practitioners were not even informed why they were being taken to the police or whether it was merely questioning or detention, although the police were legally obliged to provide such information. A Falun Gong practitioner, who wished to remain anonymous, told us that three inspectors rang his doorbell and told him he had to come with them.

“I asked if they could tell me what this was about, and they said they’d explain everything once I got in the car. I got in and waited for them to say something, but they said nothing. When we arrived at the police station, I saw a sign on the door that read ‘Counter-Terrorism Inspection’. One of the inspectors told me they had hoped to resolve it in Ruma, but that they had to take me to Belgrade instead. I got in the car again with them, they turned on the sirens”.

Practitioner Olivera Milošević noticed three men loitering near the entrance to her building on the evening of 7 May.

“A classic example of someone being waited for”, said Olivera.

Hoping they would leave, she went out for a walk to the nearby shopping mall. While sitting on a bench at the mall, two plainclothes officers approached her and said: “Good evening, Olivera, we have a couple of questions for you”. They invited her to give a statement, but did not explain what it concerned.

Mira Dozet, an 82-year-old Falun Gong practitioner, was resting at home when four police officers rang her doorbell.

“I heard the bell, they said – police. It knew right away what it was about, I wasn’t surprised. They didn’t show me any document, just told me to come with them for a police interview. I thought I’d give a statement and come back home. I didn’t think they would detain me, otherwise I’d have brought something with me”.

In the car, they asked her what she had done to warrant being taken in for a police interview, adding that they usually deal with “the gravest criminals”.

“I didn’t understand any of it”.

V AWAITING THE PROSECUTOR

“I don’t have a pocket lawyer”

Eight Falun Gong practitioners spent several hours at the premises of the Ministry of the Interior, waiting for a public prosecutor who never appeared. All of them reported similar experiences: they sat in offices under constant supervision by inspectors who were polite and often fully aware that the detainees posed no threat to the person under international protection.

In some cases, inspectors even joined the practitioners in meditation exercises.

“The chief said, ‘It’s clear to all of us that you’re decent citizens, but I have a prosecutor’s order and we have to follow it. Everything depends on the Prosecutor’s Office’”, said Dejan Marković, describing what the police officers told him during the four hours he spent at the Ministry of the Interior.

Olivera Milošević said she was among the last to be brought in. The problem arose when she asked for a document stating the legal basis for questioning. She said the order was given to her half an hour after her arrival at the Ministry of the Interior and that it initially lacked the Ministry’s official stamp, which was added only after she insisted. Mira Dozet reported a similar experience, stating that she, too, was handed the order much later.

“They said I could call my lawyer or they would provide me with a legal aid lawyer. I said ‘I don’t have a pocket lawyer, you practically abducted me and I’m not prepared. Just give me the legal aid lawyer’. They made several phone calls there, struggling to find someone. It definitely took three hours, with all the writing and calling”, said Olivera Milošević.

Gordana Gosić said that she and her husband were kept together in the same office at the Ministry of the Interior throughout. She said that the inspectors were very kind and that they spoke at length.

When they finished the paperwork, with many apologies, they drove us to the detention unit. I have to add, the inspector who I believe was the chief said he would do everything to get us released as soon as possible, as soon as ‘this one’ leaves”.

Falun Gong practitioner, who wished to remain anonymous, had a similar experience. He chatted with inspectors about hobbies; they were very kind and reassured him that everything would be fine:

“He even told me he’d release me as soon as the president left. He said he knew we hadn’t done anything wrong, and that we were good people. We talked, and I could tell they were trying to help time pass more quickly for us. He even turned on the TV so we could watch the president’s arrival. Later, I showed the inspectors the exercises. They were very nice.”

VI CONDITIONS IN THE CELLS

“Everything was extremely dirty”

Following the order for 48-hour detention, all detained Falun Gong practitioners were taken to police stations in Zemun, Novi Beograd, and the City of Belgrade Police Department. Most of them describe the conditions in detention facilities as poor, stating that they had to ask for water, toilet paper, and food.

“I was taken to a cell without a sink; there was a squat toilet in the corner, and no daylight. The light was on all that time. The bed was a concrete pedestal with some sort of mat on it and a blanket, but no bedclothes, and the pillow had no pillowcase. I said there was no toilet paper and asked what I should do if I needed it. They said they kept the toilet paper with them. The button used to call the officer didn’t work or simply no one responded to it”, said Dejan Marković.

Gordana Gosić reported that she was placed with two other women in a cell designed for two. It had two beds without bedclothes, no sink, and a squat toilet. While in detention, they were not fed regularly.

“Everything was extremely dirty. No windows, a loud ventilation system, and after a while, it became unbearable. The light was on 24/7”.

According to Articles 18 and 21 of the in **Rulebook on the Implementation of Detention Measures**, in the chapter regulating the treatment of detainees, the premises must be clean, dry, ventilated, heated, and sufficiently lit, both by natural and artificial light suitable for reading and working without damaging eyesight. Each detainee must be provided with a bed and clean bedclothes, including a mattress, a pillow, a pillowcase, a sheet, a blanket and a blanket cover. Article 35, paragraph 1, stipulates that detainees shall be provided with three meals a day (breakfast, lunch, and dinner) served at regular intervals, with properly prepared, well-served and varied food.

VII VIOLATED RIGHTS

“The procedures of arrest, detention and release are fraught with deficiencies and demonstrate that this was most probably a completely unlawful action by the police”.

The Falun Gong practitioners were released on the evening of 8 May, at around 8 o'clock p.m. In the decision on the termination of detention to which we had access, it was stated that the grounds for detention under Article 294, paragraph 1 of the Criminal Procedures Code had ceased, though the specific reasons were never listed. Although nearly all detained members of the group agree that the police treated them in a dignified manner, many elements point to the unlawfulness and procedural shortcomings of the entire process. Vladica Ilić, a human right lawyer and head of the legal team at the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, begins with the detention order, which stated that members of the group were suspected of the criminal offence of endangering a person under international protection, as defined in Article 392, paragraph 4 of the Criminal Code of Serbia: “Whoever threatens the safety of the person referred to in paragraph 1 of this article by seriously threatening to attack them, their official premises, private home, or means of transportation, shall be punished with imprisonment from six months to five years”.

“If these people did none of that, that is, if they were at home the entire time and did not pose any threat to protected persons, then it is clear that the entire action was unlawful. What most likely happened is that the police, or the Security Intelligence Agency, had a list of members of this association and carried out what you could call preventive arrests. This is unlawful in our country”, Ilić said.

He further explained that the arrest procedure itself was flawed, as evidenced in the detention order: “They didn’t even specify whether the person was arrested or responded to a summons – they left it as ‘when arrested, that is, when responded to the summons’. This kind of legal formulation must be precise. Based on what you’ve said, this man was arrested”.

Another of the Ministry of the Interior’s failures concerns the obligation to inform detainees immediately once the decision on detention has been made by the prosecutor. In addition, the written detention order must be delivered to the detainee within two hours of being verbally notified of their detention. “According to what’s written in the order, it appears that people were detained and then, two hours later, informed – you are detained. But the two-hour deadline does not refer to when you must be told you are detained, but it refers to when the detention order must be delivered”, Ilić explained.

Ilić said that the same detention order also failed to explain the existence of reasonable doubt, nor did it specify what the Falun Gong practitioners were alleged to have done – “whether, for example, they approached Xi, whether this was captured on camera, whether his security was endangered, etc.”

Pored toga, u rešenju o zadržavanju ne postoji obrazloženje zašto privedeni nisu odmah odvedeni kod tužioca nego su zadržani do dva dana. Ilić objašnjava da nije dovoljno da postoji samo osnovana sumnja da je neko počinio krivično delo da bi bio zadržan. Prema članu 291. ZKP, policija je dužna da uhapšena lica bez odlaganja odvede kod nadležnog javnog tužioca. Odstupanje od redovne procedure, koje se desilo u slučaju članova/ica „Falun Gong“, mora biti dodatno obrazloženo.

Further, the detention order provided no justification for why the detainees were not brought before the prosecutor immediately, but instead held for up to two days. Ilić explained that the mere existence of reasonable suspicion that someone has committed a criminal offence is not sufficient ground for detention. Under Article 291 of the Criminal Procedure Code, the police are obliged to take the arrested person to the competent public prosecutor without delay. Any departure from standard procedure, as occurred in the case of the Falun Gong practitioners, must be additionally justified.

“If a person is held in police custody for up to 48 hours, there must be a special justification for applying this ‘extraordinary procedure’. That decision must clearly state what the prosecutor is doing and why they chose not to have the police bring the suspect in for questioning immediately after the arrest, but instead to keep the person in custody for up to 48 hours beforehand. Since this constitutes a form of deprivation of liberty, the decision must be clearly reasoned. If this is omitted from the detention order, such a decision is problematic”, Ilić said.

In the final part of the orders, it was also stated that the suspects had not filed a complaint – something that, according to Ilić, represents yet another common omission by the Ministry of the Interior: “At the moment someone hands you an order and you sign to confirm receipt, the question arises how can the police possibly know that you will not file a complaint? The Criminal Procedure Code provides that a complaint may be lodged within six hours of receiving the detention order. But in this case, the police had already entered into the computer system that the suspect had not filed a complaint, which is unlawful”.

“The procedures of arrest, detention, and release are fraught with deficiencies and demonstrate that this was most probably a completely unlawful action by the police”, Ilić said, adding that the decision on release from detention was equally deficient, as it failed to specify which grounds for detention had ceased to exist.

All the facts presented in this report are further supported by the fact that, more than a year after their arrest and detention, none of the Falun Gong practitioners have been contacted by the Higher Prosecutor’s Office or Ministry of the Interior regarding their case.

VIII RECOMMENDATIONS

The Youth Initiative for Human Rights calls on the institutions of the Republic of Serbia – **the Ministry of the Interior and the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office** – to refrain from any further political instrumentalisation of institutions and abuse of the law. We urge both the **Higher Public Prosecutor's Office** and the **Criminal Police Directorate – Counter-Terrorism Department** to promptly inform the eight detained Falun Gong practitioners of the grounds for their detention and the current status of their case.

We call on the **Commissioner for the Protection of Equality** to promptly inform the public of any actions taken within their mandate, and to clarify whether the eight Falun Gong practitioners were subjected to discrimination on the basis of beliefs.

We also call the **Ombudsman** to carry out oversight of the actions of the **Ministry of the Interior** in this specific case, within the scope of his jurisdiction.

At the same time, we call on **international institutions**, first and foremost the **European Parliament**, the **European Commission**, the **OSCE**, the **Council of European Commissioner for Human Rights**, and **UN Human Rights Council**, to strongly condemn the arrest and detention of Falun Gong practitioners in Belgrade. We urge these bodies to call on Serbian institutions to refrain from any similar actions in the future, as such conduct would once again violate the rights and freedoms of members of this group, as well as the laws and the **Constitution of Serbia**, and the international treaties to which it is a party.

