

ACAT (Harrow group) – prayer case of the month (*January 2021*)

Please pray as you feel led for former lawyer **Zhang Zhan** (37) who is facing a four-year sentence in China, having been found guilty of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” following her independent reporting of the start of the coronavirus pandemic in Wuhan.



Zhang Zhan is one of several citizen journalists who have run into trouble for reporting on Wuhan. There is no free media in China and authorities are known to have clamped down on activists or whistleblowers seen as undermining the government’s response to the outbreak. Zhang Zhan is the first known person to be tried and sentenced for challenging the Chinese government’s narrative about the coronavirus pandemic.

In a video interview with an independent filmmaker before her arrest, **Zhang Zhan** said she decided in February to travel to Wuhan (400 miles from her home in Shanghai) after reading an online post by a resident about life in the city during the outbreak. Once there, she began documenting over three months in livestreams and essays what she saw on the streets of empty shops and in overflowing hospitals and crematoria. Despite threats by the authorities she also reported on residents worrying about their incomes and on victims of the pandemic seeking accountability. Her reports were widely shared on social media and some of her posts were very critical of the Chinese government’s response. As a Christian, she believed that the world needed to know the truth.

She was arrested in Shanghai in May. In protest against her arrest, she went on a hunger strike and is now said to be in very poor health. She is also reported to have been tortured. Her lawyer said in a statement that when he visited her in early December she had told him she was being restrained and force-fed via a feeding tube. He also said she was suffering from headaches, dizziness and stomach pain. During her trial which lasted less than three hours she appeared in court in a wheelchair and pleaded ‘not guilty’ to the charges.

Updates: Please also remember in your prayers the two women listed below:

IRAN: **Nasrin Sotoudeh** (featured in the updates of our December prayer case of the month sheet), who was temporarily released from prison in November, has now been ordered back to Iran’s infamous Shahr-e Ray “Gharchak” prison despite still having COVID-19.

SAUDI ARABIA: **Loujain al-Hathloul**, our prayer case for July, has been sentenced to almost six years imprisonment.