

Advocate for Rights Given Prison Term in China

By KEVIN DREW

April 10, 2012

HONG KONG — Ni Yulan, a rights advocate crippled from abuse during previous imprisonments and later left homeless on the streets of Beijing, was sentenced by a Chinese court on Tuesday to more than two years in prison, an advocacy group said.

The court in the Xicheng district of Beijing sentenced Ms. Ni and her husband, Dong Jiqin, on charges of creating a disturbance, according to Chinese Human Rights Defenders, a group based in Hong Kong. It said Mr. Dong was sentenced to two years, while Ms. Ni was sentenced to two years and eight months because of an additional charge of fraud.

The couple were arrested in April 2011. Prosecutors said that Ms. Ni, who holds a law degree from China University of Political Science and Law, had taken money for legal advice, despite having been disbarred. The court also said that Ms. Ni and Mr. Dong had failed to pay 69,972 renminbi, or about \$11,100, in hotel bills, The Associated Press reported.

Ms. Ni has been jailed twice before, both times on charges of “obstructing official business.” In 2002, she helped residents of Xicheng fight eviction from their homes as the government was remaking Beijing for the 2008 Olympics. During her detention, she said, she was kicked and beaten for 15 hours, leaving her unable to walk. She was released after 75 days.

She was jailed again in 2008 and eventually released in 2010 but was left homeless: Her family residence had been demolished while she was in prison, and she said the police made it difficult for her to rent an apartment or hotel room. She and her husband camped out in a donated tent at a Beijing park, attracting much news media attention. The authorities then moved the couple to a hotel room.

She has described various instances of abuse she experienced during her time in prison: an officer urinating on her face, and prison officials taking away her crutches, forcing her to crawl from her cell to the prison workshop.

The mistreatment has left Ms. Ni frail. During her trial in December, she had to be propped up on a makeshift bed with an oxygen mask tethered to her face.

With the sentencing, the “Chinese government tells the world defiantly that it has nothing but disdain for human rights and that it treats its international and constitutional obligations merely as decorations,” said Renee Xia, international director for the rights defenders group, in a statement posted on the organization’s Web site.

In a statement released in front of the Beijing court on Tuesday, the European Union said that it was “deeply concerned” about Ms. Ni’s sentence and that because of her poor health she should be released

immediately.

Copyright 2012 New York Times Company