

Group works to ensure lawyers' rights

A process launched in March by the All China Lawyers Association has helped dozens of lawyers safeguard their rights.

The association and its local branches have received 224 complaints in which lawyers claim their rights were infringed upon since March. Jiang Min, vice-president of the association, said on Thursday that 60 have been solved, with lawyers' rights being protected. The remaining cases are still in the pipeline, he said at a news conference on Thursday in Beijing.

Most complaints are about lawyers' human rights and defense rights being harmed; lawyers being kept from clients or from reviewing case files; or lawyers being stopped from collecting evidence, Jiang said.

Some lawyers claimed that they had been interrupted while making defense statements in court, or being forced from courtrooms altogether, he said.

The Ministry of Justice said that in recent years, a growing number of violations has occurred nationwide, attracting attention from the public and media.

That's why the lawyers group at the national and local levels established two centers in March—one for the protection of lawyers' rights and the other to handle complaints and reports against lawyers.

"If we find cases involving the lawyers' legal rights being seriously harmed, we'll immediately set up a joint investigation team to conduct further investigation and coordinate relevant departments to timely look at the case and give feedback about the processing result," Liu Shoumin, another vice-president of the association, said on Thursday.

One typical case occurred on July 11, when Wang Yantao, a lawyer from Hebei Shili Law Firm, waited in line at the gate of a district court in Handan, Hebei province, and quarreled with the bailiffs.

Wang said three bailiffs pulled him into the security room and six bailiffs assaulted him and locked him up until the court's vice-president arrived at the scene and had him freed.

Wang lodged a complaint to the Handan City Lawyers Association, and eventually reached the national association, which reported the case to the Ministry of Justice.

Xiong Xuanguo, vice-minister of justice, told the association to report the case to the Supreme People's Court (China's top court) and required the Hebei provincial department of justice to investigate. The top court notified the Hebei provincial high court, which ordered the local court in Handan to investigate.

On Aug 9, the district court made a public apology to Wang and compensated

him. The team leader of the bailiffs was punished and the six bailiffs were fired, the court said.

Jiang from the association said its leaders will encourage local branches to share with each other successful experiences and common problems.