

The CCTV Campaign

A timeline of how we are holding Chinese state/party TV accountable for airing illegal forced confessions overseas



This background document was last updated: 10 June 2020

It contains a simplified infographic timeline of the campaign; a more detailed narrative timeline; and a comprehensive list of all complaints filed by Safeguard Defenders and others.

Introduction

Since Chinese leader Xi Jinping came to power in 2013, likely hundreds of human rights defenders, Uighurs and other detainees have been paraded on TV to read a “scripted” confession made to look like a voluntary interview.

Our research, laid out in a comprehensive report, [Scripted and Staged](#), revealed how these were extracted by police through torture, threats to loved ones and promises of lenient treatment. With no lawyer access, many even in incommunicado detention, these violate the fundamental right to a fair trial and the right to remain silent. Chinese media were complicit in both helping to make some of these confessions and in packaging them as “news”.

We kicked off this campaign in November 2018 by publishing [Trial by Media](#), a moving book of first-hand stories from victims of forced confessions and assisting former UK journalist and businessman Peter Humphrey file the first complaint against CGTN for broadcasting his two forced confessions.

Our goal is to get CGTN and its Chinese-language sister channel CCTV-4 off the air and hold the parent company, CCTV, accountable for broadcasting forced confessions. We also want to hold those “journalists” who are involved making and presenting these confessions accountable.

Timeline of CCTV Campaign

		2018	
	23 November Peter Humphrey files complaint #1		
	30 November Gui Minhai's daughter files complaint #2		
	7 January Peter Dahlin files complaint #3 against CCTV-4		
	14 January Lam Wing-kee files complaint #4 against CCTV-4		
	28 February SD files mass complaint #5 against CGTN and CCTV-4		
		2019	
			15 March Ofcom rejects complaint #5 on grounds complaints #1 & #2 involve the same issues and broadcasts
			5 May Ofcom rejects complaint #3 on grounds it does not supervise CCTV-4 (no UK license)
			8 May Ofcom launches investigation of CGTN based on complaint #1
			9 May Ofcom launches investigation of CGTN based on complaint #2
			7 June Ofcom rejects complaint #4 on grounds it does not supervise CCTV-4 (no UK license)
			23 September Alerted by internal monitoring, Ofcom launches investigations into breach of standards complaints #6 to #10 over biased coverage of Hong Kong protests
	27 November Simon Cheng files complaint #11		
	16 December SD files complaints #12 & #13 with Canadian media regulator CRTC and US media regulator FCC against CGTN & CCTV-4		
	SD applies for Magnitsky sanctions (complaints #14 & #15) against former CCTV head Nie Chengxi & journalist Dong Qian in US and Canada media regulator CRTC and US media regulator FCC against CGTN & CCTV-4		
	19 December SD files complaint #16 about documentary on Xinjiang for biased coverage, lies and forced confessions of Uighur prisoners		
	17 January Peter Humphrey files complaint #17 for defamation on forced labour in Chinese prisons story		
	21 January SD files a freedom of information (FOI) request regarding CGTN's compliance with licensing code		
	25 February SD writes open letter (complaint #18) arguing CGTN violates licensing rules and broadcasting law as a Party-controlled media		
	26 February SD & Peter Humphrey file ethics complaint #19 with WHO against appointment of CGTN journalist James Chau as 'goodwill ambassador'		
		2020	
			9 January Ofcom launches investigation of CGTN based on complaint #11
			6 February Ofcom denies FOI request as the information is exempt from disclosure by the Communications Act
			18 May Ofcom launches investigation into CGTN based on complaint #17
			26 May Ofcom finds CGTN in serious violation related to complaints #6 to #10. Says 'minded' to impose penalty
			27 May CRTC indicates it will not launch review of CCTV-4/CGTN license, despite previous public statements it would revoke license if station repeated offenses
			29 May WHO says it has launched 'internal review' related to complaint #19 with WHO against appointment of CGTN journalist James Chau as 'goodwill ambassador'
	3 June SD & Peter Humphrey file ethics complaint #20 with UNAIDS against appointment of CGTN journalist James Chau as 'goodwill ambassador' with WHO against appointment of CGTN journalist James Chau as 'goodwill ambassador'		

- 23 November (Complaint #1, book launch, press conference, emergency meeting)

Safeguard Defenders director, Peter Dahlin and former UK journalist and businessman Peter Humphrey host a [press conference in London](#).

Peter Humphrey announces his filing of the [first privacy- and fairness complaint by a victim against CGTN](#), with UK media regulator Ofcom.

Mr Dahlin also announces the publication of the book [Trial By Media: China's New Show Trials, and the global expansion of Chinese media](#), by Safeguard Defenders. This is the first book on China's use of forced TV confessions, the role the media plays in both making and broadcasting them, and the expansion of Chinese State/Party media across Europe.

Ofcom declined its invitation to attend.

Just hours later, CCTV senior staff [are called into an emergency meeting in Beijing](#), according to an inside source.

One late Friday evening last year, a flurry of urgent messages went round China's state broadcaster CCTV's headquarters in Beijing. The recipients were being called in that very evening for a crisis meeting that would go on for the entire weekend. Something had happened in the UK that could seriously disrupt its plans to launch a massive European division with a brand new state-of-the-art headquarters in London.

- December (CGTN hires an insider)

Just weeks after the first complaint against it was filed, [CGTN hires UK journalist Nick Pollard as an advisor](#) to its European head office. Questions are raised after it is known that Mr Pollard had previously served on Ofcom's board less than a year earlier. Ex-board members are prohibited from taking on media consultancy work for six months after they leave their post. Mr Pollard joined CGTN seven months after leaving the board.

- 21 December (Support from BBC union)

BBC Journalists Union [condemns CCTV](#) and voices support of Mr Humphrey's complaint.

- 30 December (Complaint #2)

Angela Gui, the daughter of Swedish publisher Gui Minhai who was forced to appear in **three** forced confessions by Chinese police in 2016 and 2018 and broadcast by Chinese TV, files a **privacy and fairness complaint** against CGTN with Ofcom.

- 7 January (Complaint #3)

Peter Dahlin files a **privacy and fairness complaint** against CCTV-4 with Ofcom for the broadcast of his forced confession in 2016.

- 14 January (Complaint #4)

Hong Kong bookseller Lam Wing-kee files a **privacy and fairness complaint** against CCTV-4 with Ofcom for its broadcast of two forced confessions.

- 28 February (Complaint #5)

Safeguard Defenders [files a due impartiality and due accuracy \(standards\) complaint](#) against CGTN with Ofcom for airing dozens of forced confessions between 2013 and 2019. Evidence is provided that shows the systematic nature of these broadcasts.

- 8 & 9 May (Complaints accepted, others rejected)

Ofcom announces it has accepted Mr Humphrey (May 8) and Ms Gui's (May 9) complaints and [launches investigations](#).

Mr Dahlin and Mr Lam's complaints are, unfortunately, not upheld because CCTV-4 does not hold a license in the UK, unlike CGTN. Sections in Mr Humphrey's and Ms Gui's complaints that are related to CCTV-4 are not investigated.

Ofcom also says it will not investigate complaint #5 because that issue is already being covered by its decision to launch the two privacy and fairness investigations (#1 & #2).

- 18 September (CGTN loses consultant)

Mr Pollard [steps down from his CGTN consultancy post](#), reportedly over his concerns about the broadcaster's biased coverage of the Hong Kong protests.

- 23 September (Complaints #6-10)

Ofcom reveals it is investigating five new complaints against CGTN over whether its Hong Kong protests coverage broke impartiality rules. The complaint is derived from internal monitoring, but later documents reveal that at least one of the questionable broadcasts was flagged because of a later complaint made by Hongkonger Simon Cheng and supported by Safeguard Defenders (see below). Complaints target *China24* and *The World Today*, the channel's favoured programs to air illegal forced confessions.

- 19 October (China finds new channels to broadcast forced confessions)

Safeguard Defenders exposes how China is taking forced confessions onto [new platforms](#), such as short video platforms and microblogs

- 27 November (Complaint #11)

Former UK consulate worker in Hong Kong, Simon Cheng [files a privacy and fairness complaint](#) against CGTN for broadcasting his forced confession. Chinese police seized him as he was returning to Hong Kong, held him incommunicado, threatened and tortured him and forced him to repeatedly record confession statements on camera.

- 16 December (Complaints #12, #13 and request for Magnitsky sanctions #14, #15)

Safeguard Defenders extends its campaign to get China's Party TV off the air to Canada and the US.

In Canada, [we file complaints against CGTN and CCTV-4](#) with the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), arguing that because the channels aired numerous forced confessions over many years their inclusion on distribution lists (essentially a licensing system) must be revoked. CRTC has earlier stated it would revoke this if the channel committed any offenses. The complaint detailed eight broadcasts and data from 70 victims including Canadian citizens.

In the US, we outline 50 broadcast violations made by CGTN and CCTV-4 with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), arguing they constitute lies and intentional distortions and highlight how China was using these broadcasts to influence both US public opinion and political decision-making. The FCC has the power to take action if a media channel broadcasts lies and intentional distortions of facts.

We also apply for **Magnitsky sanctions** against former head of CCTV Nie Chengxi, and CCTV journalist Dong Qian in the US and in Canada for their roles in the systematic broadcast of forced confessions after 2015.

- 19 December (Complaint #16)

Safeguard Defenders files a complaint with Ofcom against CGTN 'documentary' *Fighting Terrorism in Xinjiang* for violating codes against harm and offence, hatred and abuse and due impartiality and due accuracy. The program contained 18 clips with confessions of Uighur prisoners.

- 9 January (Ofcom accepts complaint)

Ofcom [launches an investigation into Mr Cheng's complaint](#), bringing the number of complaints on CGTN that are being investigated by Ofcom to eight.

- 17 January (Complaint #17)

Mr Humphrey files his second complaint against CGTN for unjust and unfair treatment with Ofcom for a segment of the show *The Point* that aired lies about him and attacked him personally. The program was about a British child who had found a note in a Christmas card written by a prisoner in a Chinese jail who said he was forced to work against his will.

- 20 January (FOI request filed)

Safeguard Defenders files a Freedom of Information (FOI) request with Ofcom asking whether CGTN had informed it about its 20 March 2018 re-organization and **change in ownership and control**. According to Ofcom code, a license holder must do so within 28 days.

On 6 February 2020, Ofcom said it would not comment and cited exemptions to information disclosure.

- 29 January (Coronavirus confessions)

Safeguard Defenders publishes information on nine videoed confessions, part of a new Chinese police campaign to [control online information during the Coronavirus pandemic](#).

- 25 February (Complaint #18)

Safeguard Defenders sends an [open letter to Ofcom](#), urging for its license to be revoked because it has broken broadcasting regulations that clearly state that no TV station owned or controlled by a political body may retain or be given a license. CGTN publicly states on its web page that it is controlled by the Chinese Communist Party. Other evidence that support that fact can be found on government and Party documents.

- 26 February (Complaint #19)

Safeguard Defenders assists Mr Humphrey in [filing an ethics complaint with the World Health Organization](#) (WHO) for the appointment of UK-born James Chau and CGTN news presenter as their "goodwill ambassador".

- April 22 (citizen journalists & a forced confession)

Safeguard Defenders [publishes information](#) about citizen journalists Li Zehua, who was detained by police trying to cover the coronavirus epidemic in Wuhan and who later turned up in what looked suspiciously like a forced video confession.

- **May 18 (Ofcom accepts complaint)**

Ofcom informs Mr Humphrey they have accepted his complaint #17 and will investigate, bringing the total number of CGTN complaints accepted to nine.

- **20 May (UN Watch join call)**

[UN Watch](#) echoes Safeguard Defenders call against CCP-aligned goodwill ambassadors. They [call out the choice](#) of Chinese leader Xi Jinping's wife Peng Liyuan and Mr Chau. UN watch also [launches a petition](#) to have Chau removed on Change.org.

- **25 May (Mr Pollard back with CGTN)**

Multiple sources reveal to Safeguard Defenders that British journalist Nick Pollard is back working for CGTN on licensing and complaints issues.

- **27 May (CGTN found in serious violation)**

Ofcom finds CGTN in violation of broadcasting codes on due impartiality with its coverage of the Hong Kong protests in all five complaints, calling it a "[serious failure of compliance](#)". It also notes it is "minded" to impose a penalty.

- **29 May (WHO will investigate)**

The World Health Organization (WHO) says it has started an 'internal review' of Mr Chau's role as 'goodwill ambassador.' In a statement to the [Financial Times](#), the WHO said:

"The matter is taken seriously, as any such complaint would be. It is currently under internal review, and therefore cannot be commented on."

- **3 June (Complaint #20)**

Safeguard Defenders assists Mr Humphrey in [filing an ethics complaint with UNAIDS](#) for the appointment of UK-born James Chau and CGTN news presenter as their "goodwill ambassador".

- **June (Baker McKenzie hired by CGTN)**

A source tells Safeguard Defenders that CGTN has hired Baker McKenzie, often touted as “the world’s greatest law firm” to assist with issues related to licensing. The firm declined to either confirm or deny. Peter Engstrom, its San Francisco-based general counsel and person in charge of its [code of conduct](#), failed to respond. The suspected counsel, here left unnamed, did not respond to comment.

- **June 8 (Ofcom investigating complaint #18)**

Ofcom responds to request for comments on the complaint filed (#18) about lawfulness of CGTN’s license, by stating:

“We can confirm that we are actively considering this matter.” “We understand your concern with the length of time that Ofcom’s consideration of this matter is taking. However, your letter raised complex issues, which require a thorough and fair assessment.”

List of known complaints

#	Complaint subject	Date filed	Type	Target	To Whom	Status
1	Peter Humphrey forced TV confessions	2018-11-23	Privacy- and Fairness	CGTN + CCTV	Ofcom	Under formal investigation
2	Gui Minhai forced TV confessions	2018-12-30	Privacy- and Fairness	CGTN + CCTV	Ofcom	Under formal investigation
3	Peter Dahlin Forced forced TV confession	2019-01-07	Privacy- and Fairness	CCTV	Ofcom	Denied, as CCTV-4 does not have, nor require, a license
4	Lam Wing-kee forced TV confession	2019-01-14	Privacy- and Fairness	CCTV	Ofcom	Denied, as CCTV-4 does not have, nor require, a license
5	Forced TV confessions	2019-02-28	Breach of standards	CGTN + CCTV	Ofcom	Denied, as issue already under investigation due to #1 and #2
6	Biased reporting on Hong Kong protests	2019-09-23	Breach of standards	CGTN	Ofcom	CGTN fined in breach. Penalty decision pending
7	Biased reporting on Hong Kong protests	2019-09-23	Breach of standards	CGTN	Ofcom	CGTN fined in breach. Penalty decision pending
8	Biased reporting on Hong Kong protests	2019-09-23	Breach of standards	CGTN	Ofcom	CGTN fined in breach. Penalty decision pending
9	Biased reporting on Hong Kong protests	2019-09-23	Breach of standards	CGTN	Ofcom	CGTN fined in breach. Penalty decision pending
10	Biased reporting on Hong Kong protests	2019-09-23	Breach of standards	CGTN	Ofcom	CGTN fined in breach. Penalty decision pending
11	Simon Cheng forced TV confession	2019-11-27	Privacy- and Fairness	CGTN	Ofcom	Under formal investigation
12	Forced TV confessions	2019-12-16	General complaint	CGTN + CCTV	CRTC	Unclear
13	Intentional lies and distortion	2019-12-16	General complaint	CGTN + CCTV	FCC	Process unknown
14	Former head of CCTV Nie Chengxi, journalist Dong Qian	2019-12-16	Magnitsky sanctions	Individuals at CCTV	U.S. State Department	Received, being processed
15	Former head of CCTV Nie Chengxi, journalist Dong Qian	2019-12-16	Magnitsky sanctions	Individuals at CCTV	Canadian Foreign Ministry	Received, being processed
16	Xinjing propaganda documentary and use of 17 forced TV confessions	2019-12-19	Breach of standards	CGTN	Ofcom	Awaiting decision on whether to investigate
17	Peter Humphrey defamation broadcast	2020-01-17	Privacy- and Fairness	CGTN	Ofcom	Under formal investigation
18	Illegal licensing	2020-02-25	License breach	CGTN	Ofcom	Under "review"
19	Use of perpetrator of forced TV confessions as "goodwill ambassador"	2020-02-26	Ethics complaint	Individual at CCTV/CGTN	WHO	Under "internal review"
20	Use of perpetrator of forced TV confessions as "goodwill ambassador"	2020-06-03	Ethics complaint	Individual at CCTV/CGTN	UNAIDS	Awaiting decision on review