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AIDS patients fight for rights

Victims seek legal redress after facing employment discrimination

NANCHANG: On World AIDS Day, Xiao Qi (not his real name) is unsure if he will win a lawsuit against education authorities which allegedly turned down his job application because he is HIV positive.

In fact, his lawsuit against the education bureau of Jinxian county in east Jiangxi province has yet to be formally registered for handling after it was filed at a local court on Nov 26.

Nevertheless, the young man is determined to pursue the legal battle.

"Because this is not only for me, but for the whole group of people with HIV/AIDS who are vulnerable," he said.

Xiao Qi passed a teacher qualification examination in June with high scores.

But his dream to become a teacher was crushed after he was found HIV positive in a mandatory pre-employment health check.

The result was cited by the county's education bureau to disqualify him.

Defiant, Xiao Qi decided to defend

his legitimate right through the lawsuit.

But he said he is not optimistic, although government regulations on HIV/AIDS stipulate that rights to employment, schooling and medical care of people living with HIV/AIDS and their family members shall be protected by laws.

Xiao Qi is not the first person in China to file a lawsuit due to AIDS-related employment discrimination.

Yu Fangqiang, director of an anti-discrimination organisation Tianxi-

agong (meaning justices for all), said he had assisted three HIV carriers who suffered similar discrimination.

But their lawsuits were either lost or just not handled by the court.

"After losing the lawsuit, they were forced to hide their HIV status to look for other jobs or simply stay at home with nothing to do," said Yu.

China, with a population of over 1.3 billion, has an estimated number of 780,000 people living with HIV/AIDS.

The number of reported cases of HIV/AIDS stood at 492,191 by the end of October, including 68,802 new cases this year, according to the Health Ministry.

A 2010 report issued by International Labour Organisation and the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention said people living with HIV/AIDS in China faced employment discrimination, such as mandatory testing, denial of job opportunities, forced resignations and downgrading of job responsibilities. — Xinhua