

Idiom by Lon Yan

禽獸不如

qin2 shou4 bu4 ru2

To watch a man drowned without attempting to help is bad enough. To record and mock him as he struggles in the water and goes under is cold-blooded.

That was exactly what five teenagers in Florida did to a disabled man in distress in a pond. They even posted the video online. But there isn't much that can be done about such heinous conduct, as there's no law requiring people to help a stranger. The youths were eventually charged with failing to report a death.

Meanwhile, a woman in China rode her scooter over the legs of a six-year-old girl as she cried in pain. Someone took a video and posted it online, and it has caused outrage.

Such people and their conducts can only

be described as “禽獸不如” (*qin2 shou4 bu4 ru2*).

“禽” (*qin2*) is “birds,” “獸” (*shou4*) “an animal,” “a beast.” “禽獸” (*qin2 shou4*) as a term, means “birds and beast,” “less than human.” “不如” (*qin2 shou4 bu4 ru2*) is “not equal to,” “not as good as,” “inferior to,” “less than.” Literally, “禽獸不如” (*qin2 shou4 bu4 ru2*) is “inferior to birds and beast,” “worse than animals.”

The idiom means “to behave immorally.” It is used to describe the worst kind of people.

It's the same as saying a person is not worthy to be called a human being; or calling someone “subhuman,” “scum.” We don't call a petty thief “禽獸不如” (*qin2 shou4 bu4 ru2*), but we can use the idiom on a rapist, or someone who beat a child to death.

Terms containing the character “獸” (*shou4*) include:

野獸 (*ye3 shou4*) – a wild animal

獸性 (*shou4 xing4*) – brutish nature; barbarity

獸醫 (*shou4 yi1*) – a veterinarian

獸行 (*shou4 xing2*) – brutal act