

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **China: Olympics countdown -- important reforms marred by increasing repression**

Despite significant reforms to the death penalty system and new rules for foreign journalists in China, there is little evidence of improvement in other areas of human rights related to the Olympics -- and there has been increasing repression of human rights activism and domestic journalism, said Amnesty International today.

In its latest assessment of China's progress towards its promised human rights improvements ahead of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Amnesty International also found that the Olympics is apparently acting as a catalyst to extend the use of detention without trial, at least in Beijing.

"The new extra layer of judicial review for death sentences and the relaxation of restrictions on foreign journalists are important steps towards better respect for human rights in China. Disappointingly, they have been matched by moves to expand detention without trial and 'house arrest' of activists, and by a tightening of controls over domestic media and the Internet," said Catherine Baber, Deputy Asia Pacific Director at Amnesty International.

"The failure to ensure equal rights and freedoms for both foreign and domestic journalists smacks of double standards -- China has yet to meet its promise to ensure 'complete media freedom' for the Olympics."

An overriding pre-occupation with 'stability' and 'a good social environment' for the hosting of the Olympics appears to inform this approach. While such concerns are understandable for any country holding such a major international event, policies and practices must be founded on respect for rule of law and human rights, or they risk fuelling further discontent.

Moves to reform or abolish 'Re-education through Labour' remain stalled, with the Olympics apparently being used as a pretext to extend its use in order to 'clean up' Beijing in time for August 2008. The Beijing police have also recently suggested that another form of detention without trial, 'Compulsory Drug Rehabilitation', may be extended from six months to one year to force drug users to 'give up their addictions before the Olympics'.

"If the Chinese authorities and the International Olympic Committee are serious about the Olympics having a 'lasting legacy' for China, they should be concerned that the Games are being used as a pretext to entrench and extend forms of detention that have been on China's reform agenda for many years," said Catherine Baber.

Amnesty International has sent copies of its latest update to the Chinese authorities and the International Olympic Committee (IOC), noting that these issues are directly relevant to Beijing's

hosting of the Olympics and key principles in the Olympic Charter, such as 'preservation of human dignity'.

"The IOC cannot want an Olympics that is tainted with human rights abuses -- whether families forcibly evicted from their homes to make way for sports arenas or growing numbers of peaceful activists held under 'house arrest' to stop them drawing attention to human rights issues," said Catherine Baber.

### **Notes to Editors**

In the run-up to the 2008 Beijing Games, Amnesty International is publishing regular assessments focusing on four key areas of human rights relating to the Olympics: human rights activists, media freedom, death penalty and detention without trial. Key findings in the latest assessment are as follows:

### **Human Rights Activists**

Examples of growing tolerance towards some individual activists are outweighed by the continuing harassment of others who try to report or campaign more widely on human rights violations. Two veteran Chinese dissidents who had been active in the 1989 pro-democracy movement were allowed to go to Hong Kong for the first time in mid April, and HIV/AIDS activist Dr Gao Yaojie was able to travel to the USA to receive an award. However, many more activists face intimidation, arbitrary detention and intrusive surveillance of family members.

- Ye Guozhu continues to serve a four-year prison sentence in connection with his efforts to organise a demonstration against reported forced evictions in Beijing. Relatives say he suffers from health problems, partly as a result of being tortured in detention, including a recent incident at the end of 2006 where local sources say he was beaten with electro-shock batons by guards at Chaobai prison in Beijing. Amnesty International considers him a prisoner of conscience and is calling for his immediate and unconditional release.
- Defence lawyer Gao Zhisheng is being held by police as a prisoner in his own home after being convicted of 'inciting subversion' in December 2006 in connection with his peaceful human rights activism. He has claimed to other activists that he had been treated harshly during his four months in formal police custody, including being handcuffed and forced to sit in an iron chair or cross-legged for extended periods, and having bright lights shone on him. He said he only agreed to confess to his 'crime' in order to protect his family.

### **Media Freedom**

Despite promising 'complete media freedom' during the Olympics, the government is applying double standards for foreign and domestic journalists. On 1 January 2007, new regulations for foreign journalists took effect, allowing them to bypass permission from local authorities when conducting interviews and investigations. However, Chinese audiences are likely to be denied access to foreign news reports on sensitive topics, particularly after regulations were introduced in September that strengthen official controls over the domestic distribution of news from foreign agencies within China. Over recent months, other official rulings have tightened controls over domestic media, who now

- have to get permission before reporting on 'sensitive' historical events
- are banned from broadcasting news on 20 specific issues, including judicial corruption and campaigns to protect human rights
- are subject to a new penalty points system, where they may be closed down if they lose all their points over 'wrongdoings'. The system is aimed at a 'peaceful social environment ahead of... next years Olympic Games', according to a state media executive quoted in the South China Morning Post.

In recent months, the Chinese authorities have also sought to further tighten controls over the Internet. This has been followed by further censoring of certain websites, blogs and online articles. For example, a website providing news broadcasts over the internet, [www.ccztv.com](http://www.ccztv.com), was closed down in March.

### **Death Penalty**

On 1 January 2007, the Supreme People's Court (SPC) formally resumed its role of approving all death sentences, a move that Amnesty International welcomed in the hope that it would reduce the number of people sentenced to death and spur reforms in the judicial system towards greater compliance with international fair trial standards.

But a lack of transparency means it is difficult to assess whether the SPC's review is having a significant effect. For example, the state news agency Xinhua reported on 19 March that the SPC had approved four death sentences since 1 January. Yet Amnesty International recorded the executions of at least 13 other individuals during that period while monitoring Chinese news reports -- none of them the same as the four people named by Xinhua. Amnesty International is calling on the Chinese authorities to publish further details of the SPC reviews and full national statistics on death sentences and executions.

### **Detention without trial**

*"We do not rule out the possibility of compelling all drug abusers in the capital to give up their addictions before the Olympics":* Fu Zhenghua, deputy director of the Beijing Public Security Bureau.

Amnesty International continues to receive regular reports of individuals being assigned to 'Re-education through Labour' and other forms of administrative detention imposed without charge, trial or judicial review. The organization fears that these abusive systems are being used to detain petty criminals, vagrants, drug addicts and others to 'clean up' Beijing ahead of the Olympics.

The full briefing, *China: The Olympics countdown - repression of activists overshadows death penalty and media reforms*, will be available from Monday 30 April 00:01 GMT at: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa170152007>

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