

AI INDEX: ASA 27/4/99
18 December 1999

Macau: Historic occasion must not be marred by intolerance

(Hong Kong) Friday's actions against Falun Gong practitioners by Macau contradicts specific assertions on basic freedoms by the territory's authorities just two months ago to a United Nations human rights watchdog, Amnesty International said today.

"Detentions, deportations and threats of imprisonment against Falun Gong members on the eve of the handover fly in the face of grand assurances that the Macau authorities made to the Human Rights Committee of the United Nations only in October," said Catherine Baber, Amnesty International's Hong Kong-based China researcher.

The Macau authorities told the Committee, at the time, that :

- there was no restriction against any public demonstration in Macau
- that prior authorisation was not required to congregate, demonstrate and engage in religious worship in Macau
- that locals and foreigners in Macau had the right to petition in defence of their legally protected rights and interests

"The authorities are grossly overreacting to openly declared attempts at peaceful assembly," the human rights organisation said.

"It is not clear, moreover, how a Falun Gong gathering would violate the spirit of Macau laws, in view of existing rights to freedom of expression and assembly in Macau and the fact that Falun Gong is not banned in the territory.

"It appears that legal cover is being sought for a political decision to appease Beijing, which **has** outlawed the Falun Gong and is acutely sensitive to its activities at home and abroad. This does not set a healthy precedent for the implementation of the one-country two-systems model in Macau after the handover."

The human rights organisation appealed to the Macau authorities not to mar this historic occasion with demonstrations of heavy-handed intolerance and to allow Falun Gong members from Macau and elsewhere to go ahead with their reported plans to assemble tomorrow.

It also called upon the incoming administration of Edmund Ho Hau-wah to promote freedom of expression and assembly as an integral part of his stated plans for good governance.

"This is especially necessary in light of the weaknesses in Macau's Basic Law that we have highlighted in our report on the Macau handover earlier this week," Amnesty International said.

ENDS.../

For more information, or for copies of Amnesty International's report on the Macau handover please call Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific Regional Office in Hong Kong on +852 2385 7298 or +852 9267 2116 (mobile).