

URGENT ACTION

UIGHUR ACTIVIST HELD IN BEIJING

Ilham Tohti, editor of the website Uighur Online and associate economics professor at Central Nationalities University in the Chinese capital, Beijing, has been held incommunicado by the authorities since 8 July. His whereabouts are unknown, and he is at risk of torture and other ill-treatment. He is a prisoner of conscience, held solely for exercising his right to peaceful freedom of expression.

At about 1am on 8 July, Ilham Tohti phoned a friend, saying that he had been told he would be detained and that he was afraid that he would never be able to speak to his friend again. Ilham Tohti told his friend that the authorities had accused him of instigating a riot between members of the Uighur ethnic group and the authorities in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) in northwestern China on 5 July. The authorities have stated that around 190 people were killed in the course of the unrest. Ilham Tohti denied the authorities' accusation, telling his friend that he would never agree with using violence. Ilham Tohti is believed to have been detained at the university by police a few hours after making this phone call. His lawyer and family have not been informed of his whereabouts.

Ilham Tohti had been interrogated by the police between 5 and 7 July, after he posted articles on his website, Uighur Online (<http://www.uighurbiz.net/>) and his personal blog. The articles concerned a clash between members of China's majority ethnic Han group and Uighurs in Guangdong province on 26 June. The internet service provider that hosts his blog removed these articles after the riot in Urumqi on 5 July.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Mandarin or your own language, calling on the Chinese authorities to:

- √ release Ilham Tohti immediately and unconditionally as he is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression;
- √ provide information on his whereabouts, and the reasons and legal basis for his detention;
- √ guarantee that he is not subjected to torture or other ill-treatment while in custody;
- √ ensure that he is given access to a lawyer of his choice, his family and any medical treatment that he may require.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 31 AUGUST 2009 TO:

Minister of Public Security of the

People's Republic of China

MENG Jianzhu Buzhang

Gong'anbu

14 Dongchang'anjie

Dongchengqu

Beijingshi 100741

People's Republic of China

Fax: +86 10 63099216 (it may be difficult to get through, please keep trying)

Salutation: Your Excellency

Secretary of the Central Political

Science and Law Commission of

People's Republic of China

ZHOU Yongkang Shuji

Zhongyang Zhengfa Weiyuanhui

9 Xihuangchenggenbeijie

Beijingshi 100032

People's Republic of China

Salutation: Dear Secretary

Prime Minister of the People's Republic of China

WEN Jiabao Guojia Zongli

The State Council General Office

2 Fuyoujie

Xichengqu

Beijingshi 100017

People's Republic of China

Fax: +86 10 65961109 (c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Ilham Tohti, himself an ethnic Uighur, has been commenting on the situation of Uighurs in China for many years. His blog has been censored since the unrest in the Tibetan Autonomous Region in 2008. His Uighur Online website had reported human rights violations suffered not only by Uighurs but also by ethnic Han Chinese. The website has been shut down by the authorities at least twice: before the Beijing Olympics in 2008 and for more than a month in March and April 2009. The authorities have put Ilham Tohti under surveillance and interrogated him after he travelled to France in March 2009. During the trip he gave media interviews and criticised China's policies on ethnic minorities.

On 5 July 2009, hundreds of Uighurs protested on the streets of Urumqi, capital of the XUAR. The protests have to date left more than 190 people dead and more than 1,600 injured. According to state media Xinhua news agency, the Chinese authorities have detained over 1,400 participants, including several key figures accused of instigating the unrest.

The protests are reported to have begun with non-violent demonstrations against government inaction after a riot at a factory in Shaoguan, Guangdong province, resulted in two deaths. On 26 June, hundreds of Uighur workers clashed with thousands of Han workers at a factory where Uighurs had been recruited from the XUAR. Police have reportedly detained a man, a laid-off employee from the same factory, who allegedly circulated rumours which provoked the deadly clash and which the authorities later determined were false. Following the violence in Guangdong the authorities imposed an information blackout on the incident, with websites and online discussion boards instructed to delete posts related to the clash. After the 5 July riot, Guangdong police detained another 14 related to the 26 June violence.

Uighurs are a mainly Muslim ethnic minority who are concentrated primarily in the XUAR. Since the 1980s, the Uighurs have been the target of systematic and extensive human rights violations. This includes arbitrary detention and imprisonment, incommunicado detention, and serious restrictions on religious freedom as well as cultural and social rights. Chinese government policies, including those that limit use of the Uighur language, severe restrictions on freedom of religion, and a sustained influx of Han migrants into the region, are destroying customs and, together with employment discrimination, fuelling discontent and ethnic tensions. In the lead-up to the Beijing Olympics in 2008, the Chinese government initiated an aggressive campaign that has led to the arrest and arbitrary detention of thousands of Uighurs on charges of "terrorism, separatism and religious extremism".. On 14 August 2008, Wang Lequan, Communist Party Secretary of the XUAR, announced a "life and death" struggle against Uighur "separatism".

Local authorities maintain tight control over religious practice, including prohibiting all government employees and children under the age of 18, from worshipping at mosques.

Torture and other ill-treatment are endemic in all forms of detention, despite China having ratified the UN Convention against Torture in 1988.

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