

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: ASA 17/044/2004 (Public)
News Service No: 215
27 August 2004

China: Olympic Games and Human Rights

As the 2004 Athens Summer Olympics come to a close, preparations for the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics are well underway.

"Amnesty International welcomes the intense spotlight that will be focused on China in the four years until 2008," said the organization. "Severe abuses of fundamental human rights are a daily occurrence in China. If this spotlight can curtail or even end these abuses, then the Olympic Charter, with its commitment for the 'preservation of human dignity' might be relevant in China by 2008."

After Beijing was awarded the Games in 2001, Chinese and Olympic officials asserted that human rights in China would improve as a result of hosting the Olympics.

For example, Francois Carrard, executive director of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) said he was "taking the bet" that human rights would improve; Jacques Rogge, President of the IOC said: "we are convinced that the Olympic Games will improve the human rights record in China"; and Wang Wei, Secretary General of the Beijing Organising Committee said "We are confident that the Games coming to China not only promotes our economy, but also enhances human rights."

"So far at least, little has been delivered to support these confident assertions," said Amnesty International. "However, we intend to use the spotlight of the Olympics to push as hard as we can in the remaining years to see human rights in China improved above and beyond the assertions made by Chinese and Olympic officials."

Since Beijing was awarded the games in 2001, there has been negligible improvement in China's human rights record. The impending arrival of the Olympic flame has had little positive impact on human rights. Rather, the forced relocation of whole communities with little or no compensation to make way for Olympic venues in Beijing is an example of how human rights have actually deteriorated as a direct result of the Olympic preparations.

Construction projects the Beijing authorities have put out to open tender under the banner "New Beijing, New Olympics - The Opportunity for China and the World" include an execution chamber where those sentenced to death by the Beijing High People's Court will be killed by lethal injection.

"Amnesty International believes an execution chamber clearly negates the 'preservation of human dignity' that Beijing as the Olympic host city has committed to uphold."

Hosting the Olympics is a major international boost for the Chinese people. It is now incumbent on the Chinese government to uphold "respect for universal fundamental ethical principles" and deliver major improvements in human rights for the people of China.

Background

Areas of human rights in desperate need of improvement in China include:

The death penalty: China continues to execute more people each year than the rest of the world combined. A senior legislator from south-west China recently said China executes "nearly 10,000" people per year. Amnesty International is calling for an immediate moratorium on the death penalty as a step towards abolition.

"Re-education through labour": More than 250,000 people in China are being detained in labour camps on vaguely defined charges having never seen a lawyer, never been to a court, and with no form of judicial supervision. Amnesty International is calling for "re-education through labour" to be abolished immediately.

Torture: Torture is endemic in China, and people are highly likely to suffer torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment at some point of their passage through the criminal justice system. Amnesty International is calling on the Chinese government to cooperate fully with the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, and to implement all recommendations that are made as a matter of urgency.

Freedom of expression and religion: Thousands of people are detained and sentenced each year for peacefully exercising their fundamental rights to freedom of expression and freedom of religious belief. Amnesty International is calling for Constitutional guarantees to freedom of expression and religion to be recognised and practised in law, and for the immediate release of people detained for exercising these freedoms.

news.amnesty feature

In a special video feature on **news.amnesty**, dissident Wang Dan, student leader during the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown, speaks about his experiences
<http://news.amnesty.org/index/ENGASA178272004>.

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