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China: 15 years after Tiananmen, calls for justice continue and the arrests go on

People are still imprisoned, and are being arrested and harassed for their links with the 1989 pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square fifteen years ago. Scores of people remain in prison for their part in the protests, Amnesty International said.

There has been no open inquiry into the deaths and arrests surrounding the demonstrations. Amnesty International has records of more than 50 people it believes are still imprisoned for their part in the protests. This number is a fraction of the true figure, which has never been released by the authorities.

Three women, Ding Zilin, Zhang Xianling and Huang Jinping, were detained for several days in March in an apparent attempt to stop them from commemorating the anniversary. All are members of the Tiananmen Mothers, a group of victims' relatives who campaign for accountability and justice over the crackdown in June 1989.

The bodies of some of those killed during the crackdown were discovered in unmarked graves in central Beijing. At least 30 other demonstrators who disappeared that night have never been accounted for and are presumed dead. Their families suffer enduring trauma as any prospect of finding the bodies diminishes.

Ding Zilin said she feared massive construction in preparation for the 2008 Olympics would make it "extremely difficult to find even one more trace." Her son, Jiang Jieliang, was 17 when he was shot in the back and killed near Tiananmen Square in June 1989.

Other significant voices within China continue to call on the government for justice and to admit the crackdown was wrong. These include HIV and environmental activist, Hu Jia, who was briefly detained in April after appealing for justice.

The doctor who exposed the SARS coverup in China, Jiang Yangyong, was working at a nearby hospital on the night of 3 June 1989 and recalled treating nearly 90 victims. He was also questioned by police in March after writing an open letter stating the authorities had acted "in a frenzied fashion, using tanks, machine guns, and other weapons to suppress the totally unarmed students and citizens, killing... innocent students... Now 15 years have gone by and the authorities are expecting the people to forget the incident gradually," he wrote. "On the contrary, the people have become increasingly disappointed and

angry."

Amnesty International continues to call on the government to conduct an independent inquiry into the killing of unarmed students and demonstrators. Those found responsible should be tried and brought to justice. It calls on the government to release all those who are still held in connection with the Tiananmen crackdown and who never received fair trials.

Background

The 1989 protests began in Beijing and spread to other major cities and provinces throughout China. Demonstrators called on the government for an end to corruption and for democracy and other political and social rights. On the night of the 3-4 June 1989 the army moved tanks into Tiananmen Square and killed hundreds of unarmed civilians on their route. Tens of thousands were arrested across the country in the aftermath.

In March 2004 in their annual white paper on human rights, the Chinese government claimed it had made 'landmark progress' in protecting human rights in 2003. It came ahead of a European Union discussion on lifting its arms embargo against China. This was imposed in 1989 as a direct response to the actions of the government against the protesters on Tiananmen Square. The embargo was not lifted.

Public Document

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