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AI Index: ASA 17/16/99
Distr: PG/SC

To: Health professionals
From: Medical office / East Asia subregional team
Date: 5 March 1999

FURTHER INFORMATION ON MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION

(See ASA 17/05/95, 4 February 1995)

Gao Yu
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Amnesty International has learned that Gao Yu, a 55-year-old journalist, adopted as prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International in 1995, was released on medical parole on 15 February 1999. Release on medical parole means that Gao Yu can be returned to prison to serve the remainder of her sentence if she is considered to be well enough. Her sentence expires in October 1999.

Post-release reports about Gao Yu's health indicate that she has heart disease and skin ulcers. Many prisoners in China suffer general ill-health from stress and result of being held in extremely poor conditions of detention. Food is often inadequate and of low quality and prison sanitation is poor.

In January 1999, the former journalist was transferred from the Beijing prison where she had been held to a juvenile correction centre near her home. According to reports quoting her family, the terms of her parole ban Gao Yu from speaking to the media. She is not allowed to leave Beijing for more than three days or without the permission of the authorities. Reports from her husband and son say that Gao Yu is now seeking medical treatment but might try to go to Columbia University in New York later this year to study and teach there as she had planned to do before her arrest.

Gao Yu, the former deputy editor-in-chief of the *Economics Weekly* newspaper, which was banned during the 1989 crackdown on pro-democracy activities, was detained on 2 October 1993. At trials in May and July 1994 the prosecution failed to present sufficient evidence to support the charges brought against her. On 11 November 1994 Gao Yu's husband was informed that she had been sentenced to six years' imprisonment at a closed trial at the Beijing Intermediate People's Court. She was accused of "disclosing important state secrets". Neither Gao Yu's husband or lawyers had been informed of the trial beforehand and she did not have any legal representation during the trial. In a statement to the Court Gao Yu said:

"This sentence can devastate my health but not my spirits. During my one year in prison my condition has deteriorated. Every day I have to take large doses of medicine. The state of the illness has caused edema and my calves are blue and swollen. Before I step through the prison gates with my ruined body, I would like to say that I believe that history will prove my innocence..."

In a letter sent out of prison in late 1994 Gao Yu complained about suffering from angina pectoris and Menière's disease [a disease of the inner ear]. She was awarded the World Association of Newspapers [WAN] Golden Pen of Freedom in 1995 and the UNESCO World Press Freedom Prize in May 1997.

For more background information on Gao Yu's case, see the 1995 medical letter writing action and:

<http://www.amnesty.org.uk/china/china3.html>

[AIUK webpage]

http://www.fiej.org/gao_yu/verdict.html

[text of the verdict of the Beijing Court]

http://www.fiej.org/gao_yu/personal_statement.html

[personal statement to the Court by Gao Yu]

Network members should write to the Chinese authorities welcoming the release of Gao Yu, but noting that her sentence, imposed after a grossly unfair trial, has not been cancelled and does not expire until October 1999. Request that the authorities provide Gao Yu with all necessary medical treatment and seek assurances that she will not be returned to prison if her health improves.

ADDRESSES

President of the People's Republic of China

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Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Justice of the People's Republic of China

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Salutation: Your Excellency