

094/99

AI INDEX: ASA 17/27/99

EMBARGOED FOR 1601 GMT 26 MAY 1999

China: Ten years after Tiananmen -- and still waiting for justice

Ten years after Tiananmen, the time is ripe for the Chinese authorities to give a final and complete account of all those killed and injured during the crackdown, to compensate the victims and their relatives, and to release those still imprisoned for their role in the 1989 pro-democracy protests, Amnesty International said today.

In a new report, the organization examines the pro-democracy movement ten years on, and describes ten cases of people serving long prison sentences after grossly unfair trials.

“Releasing all prisoners of conscience and granting an amnesty to all others who are still in jail for their role in the 1989 protests would give meaning to the Chinese authorities’ recent commitments to upholding human rights,” Amnesty International said.

The word “Tiananmen” has come to symbolise the crushing of youth, of hope, democracy and individual freedoms to the millions of people across the world who witnessed the violent repression of peaceful pro-democracy demonstrators in Beijing in 1989.

The images are still strong -- the facts and the reality remain unchanged. Children have grown up without parents, parents have grown old without children. Many of those involved are still imprisoned, and those killed or injured have still not been accounted for. Those who have been released have found their movements closely monitored and their freedom restricted.

Amnesty International has documented the cases of 241 people imprisoned for their involvement in the pro-democracy protests which culminated at Tiananmen Square. The real figure is far higher. The ten cases highlighted in today’s report illustrate how China’s fledgling pro-democracy movement was repressed.

In May 1989, 15- year old Liu Xin reportedly went out onto the streets of Shaoyang City to watch a demonstration. He was subsequently arrested, charged with “arson” and sentenced to 15 years in prison, allegedly for supplying matches to someone who used them to burn a car. Liu Xin denied the charge and insisted he was only a spectator. He is due to be released in June 2004, aged 30, having spent half his life in prison.

Liu Xin’s story is only one of thousands which demonstrate the injustices committed in 1989. Likewise, the case of labour activist Zhang Shanguang is one of the many which bear testimony to how crackdowns on political dissent have continued unabated in China.

Zhang Shanguang was first jailed for seven years in 1989 after he reportedly put up a poster criticising the government for the 4 June massacre in Beijing. He was rearrested in July 1998 and accused of revealing ‘secret information’ on peasant and worker unrest during an interview with Radio Free Asia. He will spend the next ten years in prison for ‘endangering state security’, following a trial which lasted two hours and twenty minutes.

Government crackdowns have increased as the 4 June anniversary draws closer, causing fears that repression will intensify further during the coming week. Police have detained democracy campaigners and tried to force them to sign and put their fingerprints on a statement promising they would not attempt to commemorate the victims of the massacre.

Recent statements by Chinese officials have prompted hopes -- however fragile -- that they will not forever sanction the brutal stifling of peaceful dissent. In his Government Work Report, Prime Minister Zhu Rongji recently instructed cadres not to use "dictatorial means against the people" when dealing with social unrest. Politburo Standing Committee member Li Ruihuan also told cadres to listen to public complaints and be patient in their dealing with public discontent.

"We hope these are signs that the authorities are beginning to accept that in the long run, 'maintaining stability' will be better achieved by allowing people to voice their grievances instead of repressing them," Amnesty International said.

Alongside victims' relatives, on this tenth anniversary, Amnesty International pledged that it will continue to work on behalf of the many who were killed, injured and imprisoned in connection with the 1989 protests.

"A decade has gone by, but the victims of 1989 are not forgotten. As long as these injustices continue, victims' relatives and campaigners worldwide will keep calling for them to end," Amnesty International said.

ENDS.../

To receive a copy of the report, or to arrange an interview, please call Amnesty International in London, UK, on 44 171 413 5566. ISDN available.