

EXTERNAL

AI Index: ASA 17/45/97

18 November 1997

Further information on UA 192/97 (ASA 17/34/97, 27 June 1997) - Prisoner of conscience / Ill-treatment / Health concern

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA Wei Jingsheng

China's best known dissident, Wei Jingsheng, was released on medical parole on 16 November 1997. He arrived in the United States of America (USA) on the same day and is now receiving medical treatment in Detroit, Michigan. The 47-year-old dissident has spent most of the past 18 years in jail, except for a brief period of freedom in 1993.

While welcoming his release, the fact that it is conditional means he can be taken back into prison to serve the rest of his sentence if he returns to China in good health.

Wei Shanshan, Wei Jingsheng's sister, sent the following message to the International Secretariat of Amnesty International on 16 November:

"Dear friends, ... it is likely that Wei Jingsheng will soon be released on medical parole, and in one or two hours will be on a plane to America. This is a wonderful thing which will save his life. This is the result of everybody's hard work, particularly Amnesty International's unstinting efforts. I just wanted to let you know and say a big thank you."

Wei Jingsheng was serving a 14-year prison sentence for "subversion" due to expire in 2009.

Thank you to everyone who took part in working for Wei Jingsheng's release over the past 18 years, including in this UA.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Wei Jingsheng was first detained in 1979 and sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment on "counter-revolutionary" charges for his peaceful activities during the "Democracy Wall" movement of the late 1970s. He was released on parole in September 1993, after serving all but six months of his sentence, but was rearrested in April 1994. After being held for nearly 20 months without charge or trial, he was sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment in December 1995 after being convicted of "engaging in activities in an attempt to overthrow the government".

His health, already affected by many years of imprisonment in harsh conditions, further deteriorated after his re-arrest. Over the past year, his family reported that he was suffering from high blood pressure, possible damage to his cervical vertebrae, infection in his gums and other complaints. At the Tangshan labour camp, he was held with common criminal prisoners and reportedly beaten by them on several occasions. In June 1997, according to his family, he was severely beaten by a fellow prisoner while a prison guard looked on without intervening.

UA participants may write to the address below welcoming Wei Jingsheng's release, expressing regret that he was not released unconditionally and the hope that he will be allowed to return to China a free man if he so wishes.

President of the People's Republic of China

JIANG Zemin Guojia Zhuxi

Beijingshi

People's Republic of China

Salutation: Your Excellency

Copied to diplomatic representatives of People's Republic of China accredited to your country.