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CHINA: INCREASED REPRESSION OF DISSENT

Recent reports from China signal increased repression and growing official paranoia about any form of dissent, Amnesty International said today.

On 7 October 1996, former student leader and prisoner of conscience Wang Dan, who has been arbitrarily and illegally detained for nearly 17 months, was reported to have been charged with "subversion" and to be facing an imminent secret trial in Beijing.

On 10 October, Wang Dan's relatives were told by a court in Beijing to find him a lawyer by the following day. The authorities have neither confirmed the charge against him, nor given any details about his trial. He has been detained for nearly 17 months without charge, in violation of China's Criminal Procedure Law.

On 8 October, leading dissenter Liu Xiaobo was arrested at his home in Beijing and assigned with unprecedented speed, a few hours later, to serve three years in a labour camp. The sentence was imposed by a local government committee without a trial. No official explanation was given to Liu Xiaobo's wife. The sentence is believed to be a punishment for a statement Liu and another prominent dissident, Wang Xizhe, made on 30 September, calling on the authorities to respect the constitution and the Tibetans' right to self-determination. Wang Xizhe's whereabouts have been unknown since Liu Xiaobo's arrest. It is feared he too may be arrested.

"Trying Wang Dan secretly and rushing Liu Xiaobo to a labour camp without trial runs counter the Chinese authorities' claim that they are trying to make progress on human rights," Amnesty International said. "Wang and Liu's only 'crime' was to peacefully exercise their right to freedom of speech and association, which are guaranteed by China's Constitution."

"In the case of Wang Dan, the very least the authorities can do after 17 months of silence is to grant him an open trial, in accordance with Chinese law, and the right to prepare his defence," the organization said.

Amnesty International is also calling on the authorities to disclose without delay the current whereabouts and legal status of Wang Hui, the wife of jailed dissident Zhou Guoqiang, who is reported to be arbitrarily detained for the fourth time since her husband's arrest in 1994.

According to information received by the organization, Wang Hui was taken away from her home by several police officers at around midnight on 20 September and never returned home. She is now said to be detained in a suburb of Beijing. Her arrest appears to be linked to an open letter she addressed to the National People's Congress and to the Inter-Parliamentary Union conference, meeting in Beijing in mid-September. In the letter, Wang Hui called for help for her husband whose health has seriously deteriorated in detention.

Since her husband's arrest, Wang Hui has been repeatedly harassed by police and arbitrarily detained on three previous occasions. The last time was in May 1996, when she was held without charge for several weeks and reportedly beaten in detention.

Other incidents include the recent indictment of two ethnic Mongol intellectuals accused of trying to “split” the country for reportedly forming a group which promoted human rights and the concept of autonomy for China’s ethnic minorities. They were part of a group arrested in Hohhot, the capital of Inner Mongolia, in December 1995 and early 1996.

Hada, 41, formerly general manager of the Mongolian Academic Bookshop in Hohhot, and Tegexi, 30, formerly an employee of the Inner Mongolia Bureau of Foreign Affairs, are reported to have been recently indicted with “forming a counter-revolutionary organization”, “conspiring to overthrow the government and split the country” and “leaking state secrets”. They are due to be tried on 14 or 15 October, according to some sources. Amnesty International believes that they are prisoners of conscience, held solely for the peaceful exercise of fundamental human rights.

Repression has also increased in Tibet and Xinjiang since the start in late April 1996 of a “strike hard” campaign against crime. Parallel to the anti-crime campaign, the authorities have carried out a crackdown on suspected Muslim and Tibetan nationalists and on “unauthorized” religious activities in both regions. Some monasteries, mosques and religious schools have been closed down and large-scale arbitrary arrests reportedly carried out.

In one recent incident in Tibet, several monks from Sera monastery were reportedly arrested for refusing to sign statements prepared by an official propaganda team which had settled in the monastery for two months to carry out daily sessions of political “re-education”. The statement asked the monks to denounce the Dalai Lama - Tibet’s exiled spiritual leader - and to accept that Tibet was part of China.

“The growing incidence of arbitrary detention shows the way in which China’s own laws are flouted to suit political needs. This deeply undermines the efforts undertaken by China’s legislature and other institutions to strengthen respect for the law in China,” Amnesty International said. “The authorities have to show what they mean when they speak of progress on human rights.”

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