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CHINA: LEADING DISSIDENT, WEI JINGSHENG, TO BE TRIED ON WEDNESDAY

The trial of China's leading dissident slated to start on Wednesday will be nothing more than a show trial unless Wei Jingsheng is given a chance to mount a proper defence, Amnesty International said today as it renewed its call for him to be immediately released.

"After months of inaction the rush to get this case to the courts and the moves to effectively tie the hands of the defendant cast doubt on the outcome of the trial even before it starts," Amnesty International said.

After 19 months in detention without charge, Wei Jingsheng's trial is now being rushed through in less than two weeks. His family had only days to appoint a lawyer, and apparently, as of 11 December, neither his family nor his lawyer have yet been given a copy of the indictment or even been allowed to see him.

Wei Jingsheng is to be tried on Wednesday 13 December in what the Chinese authorities said would be an "open trial". He will reportedly be permitted to speak in his own defence and the authorities have said that this part of the trial will be open to the public and foreign journalists. However, despite a number of prominent foreign lawyers having offered to represent Wei Jingsheng, a *Reuters* report of today quotes Court Spokesman Chen Xiong as saying that, as a Chinese citizen, Wei Jingsheng does not have the right to hire a foreign lawyer.

The Beijing Public Procuratorate formally indicted Wei Jingsheng on 1 December 1995. On 3 December Wei Jingsheng's sister, Wei Ling, was told by the Court that she should find her brother a lawyer and that the trial would take place within about two weeks. This gave the family only days to find a lawyer to represent Wei Jingsheng and to prepare a defence against the serious charge of "engaging in activities in an attempt to overthrow the government". Furthermore, the family was reportedly only informed on 8 December that the trial would take place on 13 December.

Wei Jingsheng is being held in Banbuqiao detention centre, within Beijing No.1 prison. His family has not been told the details of the accusations brought against him.

Amnesty International considers Wei Jingsheng to be a prisoner of conscience who is being held for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression and association. It is calling again for his immediate and unconditional release. The organization also calls on the international community to protest against the denial of proper time and facilities for Wei Jingsheng to prepare his defence adequately.

## **BACKGROUND**

Wei Jingsheng was formally arrested on 21 November 1995 after 19 months of arbitrary and illegal detention. The charge brought against Wei Jingsheng of "engaging in activities in an attempt to overthrow the government" is vague and the authorities have not shown that he was involved in any activity that could legitimately be construed as being "criminal" under international standards.

Wei Jingsheng, 44, "disappeared" into police custody after being detained on 1 April 1994. He was held incommunicado, and without charge, at an undisclosed location believed to be in a Beijing suburb until he was charged. For over 19 months, his relatives were neither allowed to see him, nor informed of the reasons for his detention. His long detention without charge violates the provisions of Chinese law under which no-one should be detained without charge for more than 10 days.

Wei Jingsheng was released on parole in September 1993 after serving fourteen and a half years of a 15-year prison sentence imposed in 1979 on "counter-revolutionary" charges. His re-arrest in April 1994 came amidst a new crackdown on dissidents in Beijing during that period. On 7 April 1994 his father was reportedly told by the authorities that his son had "violated his parole regulations", though he was arrested after the end of his parole.

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