

TO: PRESS OFFICERS

FROM: IS PRESS OFFICE

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INTERNAL

RE: NEWS RELEASE EMBARGOS

When sending out this news release, please bear in mind the letter you were sent in July about embargos. In an effort to tighten up our procedures so that no more embargos are broken, we are asking you to ensure that media and press do not receive the news release and report more than one day in advance of the embargo. Briefings should also not be held earlier than one day in advance, and on the understanding that the embargo will be honoured.

Thanks for your help in this.

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£CHINA:
@HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS UNJUSTLY HELD
UNDER UNFAIR DETENTION SYSTEM

Hundreds of thousands -- possibly millions -- of people in China including prisoners of conscience are arbitrarily or even illegally detained under the country's blatantly unfair system of administrative detention, Amnesty International said today.

"People are picked off the streets often at the whim of the police or local officials, can be held for years on end without ever being tried and often face torture or are kept in deplorable conditions," Amnesty International said.

In a new report released today, the human rights organization shows that the official regulations, decisions and instructions set out for administrative detention are vague, many unpublished and frequently ignored -- leading to widespread illegal and arbitrary detention.

"Each year, hundreds of thousands of people are held under the confusing array of detention systems," Amnesty International said, "picked up on suspicion of 'roaming from place to place committing crimes' or carrying out acts that fall between 'a crime and an error'."

The police directly run the detention system in many cases, without any involvement by the courts and no effective appeal process for detainees. They often don't even follow the loose rules set out for detention, especially when holding people under one vaguely defined form of detention called "shelter and investigation". They detain people who don't fall into the detention categories and hold them sometimes for years longer than the time allowed. Even official sources have acknowledged that many people are "unjustifiably" detained.

Many detainees have also been tortured or ill-treated, often by beating, or have been kept in degrading conditions, while cut off from the outside world in administrative detention centres.

The deplorable conditions in a "shelter and investigation" centre were described to Amnesty International by one former detainee. Twenty-four people were crammed into a small room where they were kept in the cold, given barely enough to eat, and the only toilet was a hole in the cell floor.

Some of the people detained in "shelter and investigation" centres or in "labour re-education" camps - the other main form of administrative detention - are political or religious dissidents, including prisoners of conscience. At least several hundred people are known to have been sent to the "re-education" camps after the 1989 pro-democracy protests.

One man held for two months said his "crimes" included collecting leaflets and taking pictures during the protests in Beijing. Another, a 75-year-old religious leader, was sent to a "labour re-education" camp for his religious convictions on the very day he was released from prison after serving an eight-year sentence.

The overwhelming majority of the detainees, however, are simply people of low social status - vagrants, the unemployed, and migrants - and those

regarded as "social deviants".

Until 1989, the administrative detention systems and the abuses committed under them were reported and openly criticized in the Chinese official press, which denounced the frequent ill-treatment of detainees and the illegal use of administrative detention by the police. Since the crackdown on pro-democracy protesters, however, very few such criticisms have been voiced.

Amnesty International is calling on the Chinese government to release all prisoners of conscience held under administrative detention and any other political prisoners if they are not to be promptly given a fair trial and to repeal any legislation which allows people to be detained without trial for being "anti-socialist", "anti-party", or "counter-revolutionary elements". The organization is also urging the government to ensure the impartial investigation of all complaints of torture and introduce safeguards to prevent torture.

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