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China: Sixty housing rights activists detained outside UN meeting in Shanghai

Joint statement by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Realizing Rights

Around sixty activists were detained by the police this morning in front of the Oriental Pearl building in Shanghai after they attempted to deliver a letter to United Nations officials attending the UN Global Compact Summit taking place nearby. Around 40 are still believed to be detained at Century Plaza police station in Pudong, Shanghai. The twenty others have reportedly been taken back to their home districts by local district officials. Their current legal status is unclear.

Among others attending the UN Global Compact meeting was Irene Khan from Amnesty International Secretary General, the Executive Director of Human Rights Watch Kenneth Roth, and Mary Robinson, the President of Realizing Rights: the Ethical Globalization Initiative and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

“To detain activists simply for trying to pass a letter to the United Nations is a violation of their right to peacefully express their grievances. They should be released immediately and unconditionally,” the three representatives said in a joint statement. “These detentions also contravene the spirit of the UN Global Compact which is a forum for open dialogue on promotion of human rights, labour rights, environmental protection and other concerns by businesses and NGOs,” they added.

The letter, addressed to Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, reportedly listed grievances by housing rights activists in Shanghai, including allegations against the local authorities and police of human rights abuses, including ill-treatment, arbitrary detention and imprisonment of fellow housing activists. It requested that Kofi Annan raises these concerns directly with the central Chinese authorities.

These detentions follow a pattern of arrests of activists and petitioners in China, attempting to draw attention to various grievances including alleged forced evictions and land grabs in the context of China's economic reforms.

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