

URGENT ACTION

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Fear of Mass Arrests

24 May 1989

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA: Fear of mass arrests and use of lethal force against peaceful demonstrators

Following the imposition of martial law in the Chinese capital, Beijing, on 19 May, large-scale demonstrations by students, workers and residents are continuing in the capital and other major cities. The troops called in to enforce martial law in Beijing have not yet intervened to disperse demonstrators and remain based in the outskirts of the capital. However, there are reports of large troop movements in China's provinces, and more troops are said to have been sent to Beijing. China's state television announced on 22 May that the city of Wuhan in central China had been placed under military control. This was apparently imposed after students began a sit-in at one end of a strategic bridge over the Yangtze river on 16 May, bringing traffic to a standstill. Large scale peaceful protests also continue in Shanghai, Nanjing, Canton, Xian and many other cities. Tens of thousands of workers in Shanghai are said to have joined the students' protests there. In Urumqi, the capital of the Xinjiang Autonomous Regions in north-west China, groups of protesters reportedly stormed the local Communist Party headquarters and were "severely dealt with", according to an official Shanghai newspaper which gave no further detail.

A decision may be made to enforce martial law in Beijing and to stop by force the peaceful demonstrations there and in other cities. In this regard Amnesty International is calling on the Chinese authorities to issue instructions to all troops and security forces setting out strict guidelines limiting the use of force in crowd control situations, and to impose rigid restrictions on the use of lethal force, firearms and other means in accordance with international standards governing the use of force in law enforcement.

All protests and marches have so far been peaceful, though a clash between soldiers and protesters took place early on 23 May in the outskirts of Beijing. The clash was said to have occurred when a large convoy of tanks and military trucks attempted to break through crowds of people and makeshift barricades, apparently to move to a nearby military encampment. The clash, however, was reportedly an isolated incident and the troops massed on the outskirts of Beijing have so far made no attempt to enter the city. On 23 May hundreds of thousands of protesters, including staff from several government ministries, marched again through Beijing.

There are still deep divisions among China's political and military leadership about the enforcement of martial law and whether to restore order by force. After martial law was declared, ten government ministers reportedly offered to resign, and several political and military

leaders declared their sympathy for the students. By 23 May, the situation of the Party General Secretary, Zhao Ziyang, who had opposed the imposition of martial law, was still unclear.

On 22 May, members of the National People's Congress (NPC), China's parliament, began gathering signatures to open a special session of the NPC in order to consider the legality of martial law. By 23 May, some 40 to 50 signatures were said to have been gathered out of the 80 required for the opening of such a session. It is believed that the NPC Chairman, Wan Li, who has cut short a trip to the USA to return to China, may call an emergency meeting of the NPC Standing Committee to debate martial law. It was also reported on 23 May that over 100 military officers have vowed to refrain from entering Beijing to repress the crowds occupying the centre of the city.

Despite that, however, late on 23 May, there were reports that the majority of the commanders of China's eight military regions had pledged their support to the Prime Minister, Li Peng, who declared martial law on 19 May, and that the number of the provinces whose leaders had expressed loyalty to him was also increasing.

In this confused situation, it is uncertain whether force will be used to repress peaceful protesters. However, as long as large-scale demonstrations continue throughout China, the possibility remains.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/airmail letters:

— urging the authorities to issue immediate instructions to troops and security forces not to resort to the use of lethal force to repress peaceful protesters, and to conform to the restrictions laid down in international standards regarding the use of force and firearms by law-enforcement officials.

APPEALS TO:

Li Peng
Prime Minister
Guowuyuan
Beijing
People's Republic of China

Telegrams: Li Peng Zongli
Beijingshi, China
Telexes: 22478 MFERT CN
(Please forward to the Prime Minister)

Wan Li
Chairman
National People's Congress

Xijiao
People's Republic of China

Telegrams: Wan Li Zhuxituan
Changwu Zhuxi, National People's Congress, Beijingshi, China

COPIES TO: Diplomatic representatives of the People's Republic of China in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 5 July 1989.