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China: 13 years on from Tiananmen - an unresolved human rights issue

"Thank you for your letter We will never forget those who lost their lives in 1989. They will live with us forever. I am sure that I can make my life better with your help."
[A letter sent from a Tiananmen Mother in reply to an Amnesty International member in Canada]

Every year people around the world commemorate the victims of the violent crackdown by the Chinese authorities against the 1989 pro-democracy movement. "Those who lost their lives or who were imprisoned in 1989 were calling for political reform, a transparent and accountable government and an end to corruption. The majority did this peacefully," said Amnesty International.

Thirteen years after the crackdown, despite repeated appeals from within China and abroad, the Chinese authorities have failed to account for those killed, injured and imprisoned during the crackdown on the 1989 pro-democracy protests.

One of the most vocal and vulnerable groups in China, the Tiananmen Mothers, has campaigned to seek redress and compensation from the Chinese authorities. Ding Zilin, and other members from the group have had their names put forward for consideration by the Nobel Prize Commission this year. Amnesty International continues to support The Tiananmen Mothers to seek redress and accountability.

Amnesty International has documented the cases of 195 people who are still imprisoned after swift and unfair trials, either for their involvement in the 1989 pro-democracy protests, or more recently for calling for a review of the official "verdict" on the protests. The real figure is much higher; stories of those imprisoned for their 1989 activities continue to reach the organization.

"The circle of victims continues to increase each year," Amnesty International said. "Those seeking to commemorate the anniversary of the crackdown, which culminated on 4 June 1989, continue to be arrested and held in labour camps. Those calling for a review of the events - some through posting appeals on the internet - have also being arrested and sentenced for

drawing attention to the crackdown."

Wang Jinbo, a member of the China Democracy Party from Shandong Province, was convicted of subversion and sentenced to four years imprisonment in December 2001. He was charged with several offences including a message he placed on the internet urging the Chinese authorities to overturn the official verdict on the 1989 pro-democracy protests.

Another dissident, Huang Qi, from Chengdu, Sichuan Province, was arrested on 3 June 2000, the eve of the eleventh anniversary of the 1989 Tiananmen massacre. The website was partly established to help find relatives and friends of those who were victims of the crushing of the pro-democracy demonstrations in 1989 and included published articles about the events in 1989.

Huang Qi was later charged with subversion but his trial postponed several times. Finally on 14 August 2001 he was tried in secret. No family members were allowed to attend and since then no verdict has been announced.

Both these arrests follow a series of detentions and trials that reflect the government's on-going determination to prevent any review or discussion of the 1989 massacre thirteen years ago.

Amnesty International is reiterating its appeal to the Chinese authorities to release all prisoners who are still held in connection with the 1989 pro-democracy protests and to account for all those killed and injured and to offer compensation to the families. "This would bring to a close the long battle to seek redress for past human rights violations and be a significant step by China at a time when the international community has showed its support to resolve grave human rights violations by establishing an International Criminal Court," Amnesty International said.

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