

EXTERNAL

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Prisoner of conscience / Ill-treatment /
Health concern

27 June 1997

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA Wei Jingsheng, 47

Wei Jingsheng, China's best-known dissident, who is serving a 14-year prison sentence in Tangshan, Hebei province, has reportedly been severely beaten by a fellow prisoner earlier this month while prison guards looked on without intervening.

According to his relatives, the incident occurred about a week before they saw Wei Jingsheng at the prison on 19 June. It started when Wei Jingsheng attempted to borrow a screwdriver from a box of tools normally available to all prisoners. One prisoner denied him access to the tool, then hit Wei Jingsheng while five other prisoners held him still, his relatives said.

The prisoner who hit Wei Jingsheng reportedly received a reduction in sentence the next day. Wei Jingsheng, on the other hand, is reported to have been punished by the prison authorities on the grounds that he had provoked the fight and punched the other inmate. The electricity was cut off in his cell and he was banned from shopping in the prison canteen, where he usually buys medicine for back pain, his family said.

His relatives, who made a complaint to the authorities about the incident, are concerned about his health and safety in prison, fearing the incident may be repeated. He is reported to suffer from heart trouble and other complaints, and his health has deteriorated in prison. According to his family, this is not the first time he has been beaten by other prisoners, but this time the beating was more severe.

As yet there has been no official comment about the incident.

Amnesty International considers Wei Jingsheng to be a prisoner of conscience arbitrarily imprisoned for the peaceful exercise of his fundamental human rights.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Wei Jingsheng, a veteran pro-democracy campaigner from Beijing, is serving his second term in prison for his outspoken comments on political and human rights issues in China. The editor of an unofficial journal during the Democracy Wall movement of the late 1970s, he was arrested for the first time in 1979, accused of "counter-revolutionary" offences and sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment. After serving 14 and a half years of his sentence, he was released on parole in September 1993, but remained free for only a few months.

He was rearrested in April 1994, and then illegally detained in an unacknowledged place of detention in Beijing for over 17 months without charge. He was eventually charged in November 1995 with "conspiring to subvert the government" and sentenced in December 1995 to 14 years' imprisonment, following an unfair trial from which independent observers were excluded. The charge referred to his outspoken criticisms of the government and to his contacts with other dissidents during the brief period he was out of prison in 1993-94.

Wei Jingsheng is serving his sentence at the Nanpu salt mine, a labour camp in Tangshan, Hebei province, some 120 kilometres east of Beijing. He has now spent a total of over 17 years in prison since 1979.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/airmail letters in Chinese, English or your own language:

- expressing concern at reports that Wei Jingsheng was severely beaten by another inmate within sight of prison guards and that he was subsequently punished while the other inmate was rewarded by the prison authorities;
- urging the authorities to impartially investigate the incident, make the result of the investigation public, and take all appropriate measures to ensure Wei Jingsheng's health and safety in prison;
- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Wei Jingsheng who is arbitrarily imprisoned for the peaceful exercise of fundamental human rights, in violation of international human rights standards.

APPEALS TO:

Premier of the People's Republic of China

LI Peng Zongli

Guowuyuan

9 Xihuangchenggenbeijie

Beijingshi 100032

People's Republic of China

Telexes: 210070 FMPC CN or 22478 MFERT CN

Telegrams: Premier Li Peng, Beijing, China

Salutation: Your Excellency

Governor of the Hebei Provincial People's Government

YE Liansong Shengzhang

Hebeisheng Renmin Zhengfu

10 Weiming Jie

Shijiazhuangshi

Hebeisheng 050053

People's Republic of China

Telexes: 26229 HBFOE CN or 26232 SHMPG CN (Please forward to the Governor)

Telegrams: Governor, Shijiazhuang, Hebei Province, China

Salutation: Dear Governor

Chief Procurator of the Hebei Provincial People's Procuratorate

HOU Lei Jianchazhang

Hebeisheng Renmin Jianchayuan

Shijiazhuangshi

Hebeisheng 050051

People's Republic of China

Telexes: 26229 HBFOE CN or 26232 SHMPG CN (Please forward to Chief Procurator)

Telegrams: Chief Procurator, Provincial People's Procuratorate, Shijiazhuang, Hebei Province, China

Salutation: Dear Sir

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of People's Republic of China accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 10 August 1997.