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CHINA: AI SENDS PROTEST LETTER TO CHINESE PREMIER, CLARIFIES THAT THE ORGANIZATION WAS INVITED TO THE ANTI-CORRUPTION CONFERENCE

Amnesty International challenged remarks made on Thursday by the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Chen Jian that Amnesty International delegates had not been invited to the Seventh International Anti-Corruption Conference and therefore had no business attending the meeting.

"There's no doubt we were officially invited and Mr Chen Jian's comments are wrong," Amnesty International said.

The human rights organization sent a protest letter to Chinese Premier Li Peng about the organization's three delegates being denied access after being officially invited to the conference, which opened today in Beijing.

"The Amnesty International delegates fulfilled all the specified requirements, which are clearly spelt out in documents issued to all participants by the hosts of the conference," Amnesty International stated in its 5 October letter to Mr Li Peng. "We deeply regret that the authorities have seen fit to prevent representatives from an international organization from attending an international conference."

The Amnesty International delegates had received several official letters of invitation, including one in late July, duly stamped with the China International Conference Center for Science and Technology (CICCST) red seal. The letter specified that it was to be used by participants for applying for a visa at the Chinese Embassy or Consulate-General in their country. The conference documentation also clearly states that the CICCST invitation letter and valid passport were all that was required for visa applications.

"Another of these letters from the official planning committee of the Seventh International Anti-Corruption Conference, which was signed by the conference Vice-Chairman and Secretary-General, Liang Guoqing, states that he is 'looking forward' to meeting the Amnesty International delegation in Beijing. Obviously, politics kept that meeting from occurring," Amnesty International said today.

Nicholas Howen, the head of Amnesty International's Legal and International Organizations Program, was barred from entering China when he arrived on Wednesday at Beijing Airport on a British Airways flight from London. Howen was sent back on the next flight.

Two other Amnesty International delegates, a senior Dutch law enforcement official and a researcher, were refused visas in The Hague and London when they applied for visas with all the required documentation to attend the conference.

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