
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 117/93

TO: PRESS OFFICERS
FROM: IS PRESS OFFICE
DATE: 16 SEPTEMBER 1993

AI INDEX: NWS 11/117/93
DISTR: SC/PO
NO OF WORDS: 997

NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - CHINA

NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

****PLEASE NOTE CHANGE TO KOSOVO NEWS INITIATIVE BELOW****

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

****Egypt - 23 September****

PLEASE NOTE: A news service item on Egypt will be sent to you tomorrow, embargoed for 23 September. It is about mass grossly unfair trials currently underway in Egypt - AI observers returned on 10 September having seen some of the trials and acquired info on torture of virtually all defendants.

Sudan - 29 September - SEE NEWS SERVICE 88

Myanmar - 8 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 111

****Yugoslavia/Kosovo - 12 October****

PLEASE NOTE: The Kosovo launch has been delayed because of invitation and visa problems. It is now scheduled for 12 October and should go ahead even if it has to be launched from the IS and sections. More information will follow as new developments occur.

EJEs and "Disappearances" - 20 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 113

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

North Korea - 1 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 88

****Refugees - 4 October****

Excom meeting begins on 4 October. News service item (ready next week), embargoed for 4 October, will be sent to targeted media by IS Press Office on EC policy and US expulsions of Haitians.

Togo - 5 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 111

Council of Europe Summit - 7 October

Open letter and news service item about the failure to solve problems in Turkey, N. Ireland, etc. Preferred strategy is to target key European national newspapers - any ideas on this from Sections are most welcome.

Francophone Summit - 11 October - SEE NEWS SERVICE 111

FORTHCOMING NEWS INITIATIVES

Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting - 21-25 October (undecided)

Iran - 3 November (international)

Venezuela - 10 November (international, linked to EJEs & Disappearances)

Papua New Guinea - 19 November (targeted)

AI INDEX: ASA 17/WU 12/93
16 SEPTEMBER 1993

CHINA: ONE OF CHINA'S BEST-KNOWN POLITICAL PRISONERS RELEASED

The Chinese authorities announced on 14 September 1993 the release on parole of Wei Jingsheng, a former electrician jailed since 1979 for advocating democratic reforms and one of China's most famous political prisoners. Now 43 years old, Wei Jingsheng had nearly completed a 15-year prison sentence imposed on him in 1979 and was due for release in March 1994. He spent most of his imprisonment in solitary confinement.

The editor of an unofficial journal during the "Democracy Wall" movement of the late 1970s, Wei Jingsheng was arrested on 29 March 1979 and accused of carrying out "counter-revolutionary propaganda and incitement" and passing on "military secrets" - in fact widely known information - to a foreigner. In one of the last articles¹ he wrote before his arrest, Wei Jingsheng criticized Deng Xiaoping - then Vice-Premier of the People's Republic of China - and warned that he might become a new "dictator". The article was later cited at Wei Jingsheng's trial as evidence of his "crime".

For most of his imprisonment, the Chinese authorities refused to disclose his whereabouts or any details about him. Last year, however, the Chinese official press published for the first time photographs of Wei Jingsheng, in apparent good health. Chinese officials also confirmed that he had been transferred to a labour camp near Tangshan, in northern Hebei province, and gave some details of his conditions there. They said, however, that he was "unrepentant" and ruled out his early release.

The timing of his release yesterday has prompted speculation in the international press that China was trying to boost its image before the International Olympic Committee decides next week on the site for the Olympic Games in the year 2000 - for which Beijing is a contender.

Chinese official sources said on 14 September 1993 that he was released because he had "obeyed prison regulations", but they declined to disclose his whereabouts. He was reportedly taken from the Nanpu labour camp, a salt mine near Tangshan, to an undisclosed location for a "farewell lunch". However, his family - who lives in Beijing - was not told where he was.

As of 15 September, his relatives had neither seen him nor been informed of his whereabouts. According to a Reuters report from Beijing on 15 September, police told Wei Jingsheng's sister that they had arranged a place for Wei Jingsheng to stay temporarily after his release, but gave no details as to the place. They also declined giving her a telephone number so that she could speak to him by telephone.

Amnesty International had campaigned for Wei Jingsheng's release since his arrest in 1979. It welcomes his release from imprisonment, while noting that it is a conditional release and has been granted when Wei Jingsheng had nearly completed his 15-year prison sentence. Wei Jingsheng is still subject to parole conditions and to three years' deprivation of political rights applicable from the end of his prison sentence. Amnesty International will continue to urge the authorities to lift immediately all restrictions imposed on him and to allow him full freedom of movement.

¹ An abbreviated translation of this article, entitled "Democracy or a New Dictatorship", was published in Amnesty International's report China: Violations of Human Rights, AI Index ASA 17/11/84, 1984, pp. 107-110. Details about Wei Jingsheng's arrest, trial and imprisonment are also included in that report.

Amnesty International also welcomes the release of another dissident, Zhai Weimin, which was announced by Chinese official sources on 15 September 1993. A student leader in Beijing during the 1989 pro-democracy protests, Zhai Weimin was on the list of the 21 "most wanted" students after the 4 June 1989 crackdown, but managed to escape arrest until May 1990. Detained since then, he was tried in 1991 and sentenced in January 1992 to three and a half years' imprisonment for founding an underground political group. According to Chinese official sources, he was released on 13 September 1993 after completing his sentence, though previously available information indicates that his sentence was not due to expire until November 1993.

While it welcomes these releases, Amnesty International is concerned that thousands of other political prisoners remain jailed throughout China, often in harsh conditions of detention, and that arbitrary arrests and other violations of human rights, such as torture and summary executions, continue unabated. The organisation will continue to press for the release of all prisoners of conscience and for an end to other human rights violations.

ENDS/