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CHINA ANNOUNCES THE RELEASE OF EIGHT POLITICAL PRISONERS, INCLUDING FOUR TIBETANS

Amnesty International welcomes the release on parole of eight political prisoners in China, announced by the official New China News Agency (Xinhua) on 6 November 1994.

This announcement has been widely interpreted as an attempt by China to prevent criticism of its human rights record during a summit meeting of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), which is taking place in Indonesia this week.

To Amnesty International's knowledge, this is the first time since 1988 that Chinese official sources have publicly announced the release of Tibetan political prisoners, while the last public announcement of the release of Chinese political prisoners was made in May 1994.

The prisoners paroled include four men who were jailed in north China for their activities during the 1989 pro-democracy protests, and four Tibetans, including three men and one woman, jailed for their views or activities in favour of Tibet's independence.

Amnesty International has actively campaigned for the release of several of the prisoners, whom it considered to be prisoners of conscience held solely for peaceful exercise of fundamental human rights. Several of them were reported to be in poor health due to poor prison conditions or ill-treatment in detention following their arrest.

According to Xinhua news agency, seven of the prisoners were released on parole for "good behaviour" and one was released on bail for medical reasons. The Xinhua report did not specify the date of their release although they are believed to have taken place over a period of time - one of the prisoners was first unofficially reported to have been freed over five months ago.

One of the eight released is said to be Yulo Dawa Tsering, a 62 year-old Buddhist monk from Ganden monastery near Lhasa and the best known political prisoner in Tibet, according to Xinhua. Arrested in December 1987, he had been sentenced in 1989 to ten years' imprisonment on a charge of "carrying out counter-revolutionary propaganda and incitement" for telling foreigners his views about Tibet. Held at Drapchi prison, his sentence was reduced by two years in October 1993 for "good behaviour" and he was due for release in December 1995.

The three other released Tibetans had also been jailed at Drapchi prison in Lhasa. They are:

- Thupten Namdrol (Tubdain Namzhub), a 63-year old monk from Dralhaluphug monastery who, like Yulo Dawa Tsering, was arrested in December 1987 and sentenced to 9 years' imprisonment on similar charges;

- Tsewang Palden (Cewang Baindain), a 59-year old carpenter arrested in December 1991 and reportedly sentenced to five years' imprisonment for his alleged nationalist activities; and

- Chungdag (Chung Bdag), a 36-year old Tibetan businesswoman in Lhasa who was arrested in March 1989 and sentenced to 7 years' imprisonment on similar charges.

The four other released prisoners had been arrested in 1989 in various cities in north China for their activities during the pro-democracy protests and had been convicted of "counter-revolutionary crimes". They are:

- Leng Wanbao, a worker at a car factory in Jilin province who was serving an eight-year sentence at Lingyuan prison, Liaoning province, where he and other prisoners were said to have been tortured in 1991;

- Ge Hu, a college lecturer in Shanxi province sentenced to seven years' imprisonment, who was reported in 1993 to be in poor health and to have lost sight in one eye - he is believed to have been released on bail for medical treatment in May 1994;

- Wang Xinlong, an assistant professor at Shanxi university serving an eight-year prison sentence, whose health was also said to have seriously deteriorated in jail; and

- Wu Zhaoqiang, 27, unemployed at the time of his arrest, who was serving a seven-year sentence at Beijing Prison No.2 and had his sentence reduced by 10 months in 1993.

While welcoming the releases, Amnesty International called on the Chinese authorities to disclose the conditions that may be imposed on the prisoners under the terms of their parole and to lift any restrictions on their freedom of movement and other fundamental freedoms. It also renewed its call on the government to review the cases of all political prisoners and to release without delay all those held for the peaceful exercise of fundamental human rights.

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