

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

OPEN LETTER

AI Index: ASA 17/087/2008

Open letter to Hu Jintao

Your Excellency

With one month remaining until the much-anticipated start of the XXIX Olympiad in Beijing, I ask you to take five steps toward the “development of human rights” pledged by the Beijing Olympics Bid Committee in 2001. Over the last year Amnesty International has collected hundreds of thousands of voices from around the world echoing this call. I join them in urging you to take this historic opportunity to act.

Amnesty International recognizes the Chinese government’s efforts to address some longstanding human rights concerns. I am particularly encouraged by the apparent progress made in reducing the use of the death penalty through the Supreme Peoples Court review process. I also appreciate recent statements by a number of Chinese officials, including Chief Justice Xiao Yang, that China is following the global trend towards abolishing the death penalty. Amnesty International also welcomes the news that 1,157 people held in connection with the protests in Tibetan-populated areas of China last March have been released. The official commitment to “full media freedom” and regulations for foreign journalists represents another step towards realising greater freedom of expression for journalists.

These developments notwithstanding, the preparation for the Olympics has actually had a negative impact in some areas of human rights. Official persecution of human rights activists continues, particularly those making connections between ongoing human rights violations and China’s hosting of the Olympics, including Ye Guozhu, Hu Jia and Yang Chunlin who are serving prison sentences solely for having expressed their views peacefully. The “clean-up” of Beijing through the extended use of Re-education Through Labour is a worrying development, particularly as it ignores domestic calls for reform of this arbitrary system of detention.

Amnesty International calls on you to grasp the opportunity of the Olympic Games to implement the following five recommendations—supported by many inside and outside China—before the Games begin:

Release all prisoners of conscience - including Ye Guozhu, Hu Jia, Yang Chunlin and any others detained in connection with the hosting of the Olympics solely for expressing their views peacefully;

Prevent the police from arbitrarily detaining petitioners, human rights activists and others as part of a pre-Olympics “clean-up”;

Publish full national statistics on the death penalty, commit to a reduction in the number of capital crimes – especially those for non-violent offences – and introduce a moratorium on executions in line with UN General Assembly resolution 62/149 adopted on 18 December 2007;

Allow full access and freedom of reporting for both Chinese and international journalists in all parts of China in line with promises of "complete media freedom" in the run-up to the Games;

Account for all those killed or detained in the wake of the March 2008 protests in Tibet, particularly 116 people officially acknowledged to still be in custody, and ensure that those detained for their involvement in peaceful protests are released and that others receive a fair trial.

I believe that delivering on these five points will go a long way towards the Games being remembered not only for positive achievements on the sports field but in the field of human rights as well.

Yours sincerely

Irene Khan

Secretary General