

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL EU OFFICE PRESS RELEASE

EU-CHINA ARMS EMBARGO DON'T SABOTAGE HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS IN CHINA, SAYS AMNESTY TO EU

(Brussels 14 April 2004) Amnesty International has cautioned the EU to consider what message it will be sending to human rights activists in China, who are still being imprisoned 15 years after Tiananmen Square, if it lifts the EU arms embargo against China.

The call comes as the EU Presidency prepares for talks with the Chinese Foreign Minister in Dublin this Monday, and with EU Foreign Ministers due to discuss the lifting of the EU arms embargo against China in the coming weeks.

It is still a bleak picture for human rights in China. Hundreds of thousands of people continue to be detained across the country in violation of their fundamental human rights. Death sentences and executions continue to be imposed after unfair trials, torture and ill-treatment remain widespread and systemic, and freedom of expression and information continue to be severely curtailed.

In a media briefing in Brussels today, Amnesty International emphasized that dozens of people are still in prison in China as a result of the brutal crackdown on protestors calling for political reform in June 1989. The briefing also outlined how the EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports cannot be considered as a credible alternative to the arms embargo against China in terms of human rights protection.

(Two briefing papers, on Human Rights in China since Tiananmen, and the EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports, are available on www.amnesty-eu.org).

"Let us not forget why the EU's arms embargo against China was imposed in the first place - it was in response to, in the EU's own words 'the repressive actions against those who legitimately claim their democratic rights'," Dick Oosting, Director of Amnesty International's EU Office, told the media briefing in Brussels.

"While the EU may be discussing whether the arms embargo against China is 'out of date', for the activists who are still being persecuted in China, sometimes merely for posing questions, the issue is certainly not 'out of date'. Pro-democracy advocates are still suffering in the China of today and the EU should think twice before letting them down," Dick Oosting said.

Only two weeks ago, in a reminder of how China treats democracy activists, three members of "The Tiananmen Mothers", a network of more than 130 families of the victims of the 1989 crackdown, were arbitrarily detained for several days, in the lead-up to the fifteenth anniversary of the events in Tiananmen Square.

The Chinese authorities continue to ignore calls for a full and impartial inquiry into the events of 1989. Activists who call for such an enquiry or criticize what happened, even in emails and on web-sites, are still being imprisoned to this day. Evidence

against one activist included the fact that he had cited an Amnesty International report on his web-site.

Also in today's media briefing, Amnesty International arms trade campaigner Robert Parker outlined the limitations of the EU's Code of Conduct on Arms Exports, which some EU governments have proposed as a safeguard in the event that the EU arms embargo against China is lifted.

"While the EU Code of Conduct sets out human rights criteria to be taken into account when granting arms export licences, it has no legal teeth and the weak wording is open to interpretation by Member States," Robert Parker told the briefing.

"Even now we see it being flouted in some parts of the EU and in countries about to join as EU members. The Code is currently under review. The EU must take this opportunity to tighten up its controls and ensure that EU-supplied arms and security equipment are not used to abuse human rights," he said.

The most recent Amnesty International briefing papers and background documents on China can be found on our web-site: www.amnesty-eu.org

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