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China: Dissident and literary scholar Liu Xiaobo formally arrested

Amnesty International condemns the formal arrest of prominent scholar and activist Liu Xiaobo on suspicion of “inciting subversion of state power” on 23 June. The People’s Daily reported that police accused Liu Xiaobo of activities such as “spreading of rumours and defaming of the government, aimed at subversion of the state and overthrowing the socialism system in recent years.”

“These charges against Liu Xiaobo seem to stem from his support for Charter 08, which actually calls for many of the same human rights protections that were reiterated in China’s first ever National Human Rights Action Plan,” said Roseann Rife, Asia-Pacific Deputy Programme Director at Amnesty International. “His arrest follows a series of crackdowns on activists around the 20th Tiananmen anniversary and intensified control of internet use which only demonstrates the authorities’ lack of commitment to and total disregard for the goals of the Action Plan.”

“This use of state security charges to punish activists for merely expressing their views must stop,” said Rife. “This is another act of desperation by a regime that is terrified of public opinion.”

Liu Xiaobo was seized from his home in Beijing by the police on 8 December, two days before the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the original launch date of Charter 08, a blueprint stemming from civil society’s calls for fundamental legal and political reform in China. In violation of the Criminal Procedure Law, the police failed to give his family information about where Liu was detained and to provide a detention notice within 24 hours. The police then placed him under “residential surveillance”, a form of house arrest with a maximum six-month limit, without charge, access to a lawyer or any due process for more than six months.

“The authorities must drop the politically-motivated prosecution against Liu Xiaobo who merely peacefully exercised his rights to freedom of expression. He should be released immediately and unconditionally.”

The Chinese authorities must also stop the ongoing harassment, detention, prosecution and imprisonment of Chinese human rights defenders and activists who are also peacefully exercising their constitutional rights to freedom of expression and association.

Background

Charter 08, initially signed by approximately 300 Chinese scholars, lawyers and officials, proposes a blueprint for fundamental legal and political reform in China, with the goal of a democratic system that respects human rights. Charter 08 was launched on 9 December 2008. Since then numerous signatories have been questioned and harassed by Chinese authorities.

Liu Xiaobo is a well-known scholar who was arbitrarily detained twice previously for his writings and his support of the democracy movement in 1989 and spent several years in detention.