

AI Index: PRE 01/269/2009  
10 July 2009

## **China: Authorities widen crackdown after Xinjiang riots**

Chinese president Hu Jintao's threats of severe punishment for those who took part in the recent unrest in Xinjiang failed to address the serious human rights violations at the root of Uighur grievances, Amnesty International said.

At a meeting last night, President Hu and other state leaders called for stability and unity in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR), and blamed the "three forces" of terrorism, separatism and extremism for masterminding and organizing the riots.

"The Chinese leadership should focus both on the grim conditions that many Uighurs face and respond with a credible, truthful, transparent investigation into the recent violence," said Roseann Rife, Amnesty International Asia-Pacific deputy director.

Amnesty International is concerned about the comments of Urumqi's Communist Party Secretary, Li Zhi, who, according to state media China Central Television, stated in a news conference on 8 July that "brutal criminals will be sentenced to death."

"Only the courts are eligible to make sentencing decisions. The remarks concerning capital punishment given by the city's party chief outside the judicial system shows a complete disregard for rule of law and judicial independence," said Roseann Rife.

Sources in China told Amnesty International that Beijing judicial authorities had sternly warned a number of human rights lawyers, through the law firms where they are employed, not to take on any cases related to the unrest in XUAR. Those who have already taken up cases related to last year's unrest in the Tibet Autonomous Region had to return to the capital and report on their work to the judicial authorities.

"Intimidating lawyers not to defend individuals detained during the recent unrest obstructs their right to counsel of their choosing and undermines the likelihood of fair trials and due process," said Roseann Rife.

Sources also told Amnesty International that Ilham Tohti, editor of the Uyghur Online website ([www.uyghurbiz.cn](http://www.uyghurbiz.cn)) and economics professor at Central Nationalities University in Beijing, has been detained by the Chinese authorities since the early morning of 8 July. Beijing police interrogated Professor Tohti from 5 to 7 July. His whereabouts are still unknown. Professor Tohti has been commenting on the situation of Uighurs in China for years, and his blog has been censored since the unrest in the Tibetan Autonomous Region in 2008.

"A crackdown that extends beyond the XUAR and to people not involved in any protests, much less violence, is not the answer to the unrest," said Rife. "We urge the authorities to immediately account for

Ilham Tohti's whereabouts, and ensure that he has not been detained merely for peacefully expressing his opinions.”

Amnesty International recognizes the duty of the Chinese authorities to ensure the safety of everyone at risk from violence, and their duty to bring to justice those responsible for crimes of violence in the context of the current unrest in Xinjiang.

However, Amnesty International has documented instances where the authorities initiated heavy-handed crackdowns following protests in the region, including in Barren (Chinese: Baren) township in 1990 and in Gulja (Chinese: Yining) city in 1997, resulting in deaths of protestors and thousands of detentions. The organization urges the authorities not to repeat the patterns of past responses and to avoid the use of unnecessary or excessive force in restoring order, allow independent and impartial investigation into the events, and ensure that any trials be conducted fairly, in line with international standards, and without recourse to the death penalty.

Amnesty International reiterates its call for a fair and impartial investigation to the events that broke out in the XUAR since 5 July and urges the authorities to respect and protect the rights to life and freedom from discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin by addressing abuses and violations of these rights by state and non-state actors.

Amnesty International also calls on Chinese authorities to fully account for all those who have died and for all those in detention.

For more information, see:

Press release, 6 July: China: Fair and impartial investigation must be launched in Urumqi  
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/china-fair-and-impartial-investigation-must-be-launched-urumqi-20090706>

News article, 7 July: China must investigate 156 deaths during protests in Urumqi  
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/news/china-must-investigate-156-deaths-during-protests-in-urumqi-20090707>

Information sheet, April 2009: Uighur ethnic identity under threat  
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA17/010/2009/en>