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CHINA: TIANANMEN – Time for justice

Nine years after the 4 June 1989 crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators in China, Amnesty International today called on President Jiang Zemin to mark the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by granting an amnesty to all those still imprisoned for their part in the protests.

The organization also called on other governments to continue to press the Chinese government to release all prisoners of conscience, not just high profile dissidents such as Wei Jingsheng and Wang Dan.

“Nine years on, the Chinese authorities’ handling of the legacy of 1989 is in stark contrast with social and economic changes in the country. Now, following a smooth transition from the Deng era and the peaceful handover of Hong Kong, the time is ripe for the Chinese government to mark the 50th anniversary year of the UDHR by re-evaluating the events of June 1989,” Amnesty International said.

“Rather than using high profile dissidents as bargaining chips around summits and international meetings, the Chinese government should follow its abolition of the crimes of “counter-revolution” by granting an amnesty to all of those jailed for taking part in the 1989 protests.”

“Just because Wei Jingsheng and Wang Dan have been released, the international community should not rest on its laurels. There are many other prisoners of conscience locked up in prisons across China, some suffering ill-treatment. Governments and foreign dignitaries visiting Beijing should be pressing for an amnesty.”

Amnesty International has documented at least 250 people who are still in prison in connection with the Tiananmen protests, although the real figures are probably much higher. Hundreds of other prisoners, arrested before or since 1989, are also serving sentences for “counter-revolutionary” offences. Despite abolishing these offences in law last year, the government has shown no inclination to review the cases of people convicted of these crimes.

Apart from the change in the law, there are other compelling reasons to grant an amnesty and redress the miscarriages of justice of 1989. The majority of those imprisoned at the time received blatantly unfair trials, many were tortured to extract “confessions” and received sentences out of proportion to the crimes they are said to have committed.

Amnesty International’s report highlights the cases of several prisoners serving long sentences for involvement in the protests. Among them are:

- Chen Lantao, a marine biologist serving a 13-year prison sentence in Shandong Province for criticizing the government’s suppression of the demonstrators, was charged with

“counter-revolutionary propaganda and incitement”, and also accused of listening to *Voice of America* radio broadcasts. His wife has been left to bring up their son on her own.

•Wang Jiexiang, who is believed to be at least 75-years-old, is serving a sentence of life imprisonment for “counter-revolutionary sabotage”. He was arrested in Beijing in June 1989 and initially convicted of “counter-revolutionary propaganda” and “damaging property”. However, by the time he was sentenced - two and a half years later - the charges against him had been changed. The authorities did not provide any explanation nor any information about his trial.

•Yao Guisheng, is serving a 15-year sentence in Hunan Province for alleged “looting”. However, according to unofficial sources, he was arrested in 1989 because, together with two other people, he helped leaders of the Workers Autonomous Federation (an independent trade union formed in 1989) to escape from China, following the events on 4 June. While serving his prison sentence, he was reportedly regularly beaten and forced to wear shackles, and is said to have become mentally ill as a result of his treatment.

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For further information or to arrange an interview please call the Amnesty International Press Office on +44 171 413 5729/5566.