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China: Harassment of dissidents continues in run up to summit

The Chinese government is continuing to detain and intimidate dissidents in the run up to President Clinton's visit to the country, Amnesty International said today as it released a list of 50 dissidents who have been harassed since the beginning of the year.

The organization is calling on governments engaged in dialogue with China, in particular the United States, to urge the Chinese authorities to immediately release those detained and refrain from intimidating dissidents in the lead up to, and during the summit.

"Despite all the talk of a 'Beijing spring' -- with the release of high profile dissidents and long-mooted promises that it will sign up to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights -- the Chinese government is continuing to crack down on opposition voices," Amnesty International said.

"The releases of Wei Jingsheng and Wang Dan, although very welcome, do not mean the end of repression in China. The international community must not forget lesser-known dissidents, human rights defenders, workers' activists and their friends and relatives who are still targeted by the government, and must ensure that the authorities actually implement the human rights safeguards they profess to respect."

In many cases, dissidents were arrested after petitions on behalf of political prisoners or calling for improvements in human rights, in apparent attempts by the authorities to intimidate or silence them at politically sensitive moments. These included the National People's Congress in March and the run up to the 4 June Tiananmen Square anniversary.

Others were arrested as a warning to others, or to prevent them from meeting with other dissidents. The list also includes people who have been detained merely for being relatives of dissidents, such as the wife and 80-year-old mother of a well-known prisoner of conscience.

Fifteen of those on the list are still detained or have their movements restricted, while others have been arbitrarily detained for hours, days or sometimes weeks without charge. Amnesty International believes some may be formally sentenced to prison terms when the publicity surrounding the summit has died down.

The organization also urged President Clinton to meet with relatives of the victims of the 1989 killings and with human rights defender Xu Wenli -- as requested by a group of 55 dissidents last Friday.

“President Reagan specifically requested a meeting with Soviet dissidents at the US embassy during his historic visit to the USSR. President Clinton should show leadership in the human rights field by requesting a similar meeting,” Amnesty International said.

The organization called on President Clinton to request an amnesty for all those prisoners of conscience detained for their part in the 1989 protests and a review of all those jailed for “counter-revolutionary offences” which no longer exist under Chinese law. He should also call for the release of those jailed for peacefully seeking more religious and political freedom in Xinjiang and Tibet.

“President Clinton’s summit could make a real difference to human rights in China, provided he refuses complicity in the “hostage politics” and use of high profile dissidents as bargaining chips,” Amnesty International said. “By asking for an amnesty and by raising the cases of the “forgotten prisoners” he can send a clear signal that China must clean up its act if it wants to play on the world stage.”

Case backgrounds:

- **Li Yi**, a businessman, and **Wu Ruojie**, a rock singer, were sentenced without charge or trial to three years of “reeducation through labour”, which usually means detention in a forced labour camp. Their “crime” was to have allegedly told people outside China about the arrests of four poets who were their friends.
- **Fan Yiping**, a veteran pro-democracy campaigner and manager of a food company in Guangzhou, was detained for an investigation into his links with other dissidents. On 3 June 1998 he was indicted and charged with “arranging for another person to illegally cross the border of the state”, for reportedly helping dissident Wang Xizhe to flee China to escape arrest.
- **Li Bifeng**, a labour rights activist, was detained in March while on his way to visit his family. He had previously publicized protests by thousands of workers about the misappropriation of funds by corrupt party cadres in Mianyang.
- **Ni Yuxiao** and **Ni Jinxiu** were arrested in April. Both women are believed to have been detained because they knew some friends of their brother, **Ni Jipin** – a human rights activist from Shanghai.
- **Shen Liangqing**, a pro-democracy campaigner and former assistant public prosecutor was sentenced in March to two years “reeducation through labour” for unauthorized contacts” with foreign journalists and people outside China.
- **Chu Hailian** and **Wu Huifen**, the wife and 80-year-old mother of prisoner of conscience **Liu Nianchun**, were detained for several hours for staging a silent protest in Tiananmen Square in May, calling on the authorities to provide adequate care for Liu.

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