

China: Human rights and the spirit of Olympism

As host of the 2008 Olympic Games, China must improve its human rights situation and uphold principles enshrined in The Olympic Charter, including to encourage "...the establishment of a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity", Amnesty International said today.

Vice-President of the Beijing 2008 bid committee, Liu Jingmin, said in April that, "By allowing Beijing to host the Games you will help the development of human rights."

"Considering the escalation in serious and widespread human rights violations over the past three years, the Chinese authorities have a long way to go to demonstrate a healthy and basic respect for human rights," Amnesty International said.

In the latest "Strike Hard Campaign", the Chinese authorities have managed to execute more people in three months than the rest of the world put together for the last three years. Over 1700 alleged criminals have been executed since April. Many of them are likely to have been tortured to confess to crimes they didn't commit and few would have received a fair trial.

"Ironically, sports stadiums were the last places where many of those condemned to death were taken, to be subjected to ritual public humiliation in front of large crowds, just before being executed," the organization said.

Religious and ethnic minorities such as Tibetans, Uighurs, Falun Gong practitioners and Christians continue to face repression, including arbitrary detention, torture and lengthy prison sentences. Over 200 Falun Gong practitioners are reported to have died in custody since July 1999. When the spiritual movement was first banned, police rounded up thousands of practitioners in a Beijing stadium.

Political dissidents, labour activists and farmers who protest against corruption or injustices also face repression. Hundreds of people still languish in jail for their involvement in the pro-democracy protests of 1989. Demonstrations by workers and farmers over wages and high taxes are frequently suppressed. Many labour activists remain imprisoned for speaking out against injustices or for calling for free trade unions.

Dissidents have been also been detained or harassed for expressing their opposition to Beijing's Olympic bid and calling for the release of other political dissidents. In the preparation for China's previous Olympic bid for the 2000 Games, a number of well-known political prisoners were released, only to be re-arrested again after the decision was announced.

"The International Olympic Committee should request iron-clad assurances that people will not be rounded up and detained each time one of its officials visits Beijing," Amnesty International said. "It should also monitor how China respects the ethical principles enshrined in the Olympic Charter at all stages of preparation for the Games."

"The Chinese government must prove it is worthy of staging the Games by upholding the Olympic spirit of "fair play" and extending "respect for universal fundamental ethical principles" to the people of China," Amnesty International said.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>