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“CHINA: NO ONE IS SAFE”

**STATEMENT BY PIERRE SANÉ, SECRETARY GENERAL
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL**

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HONG KONG CULTURAL CENTRE**

(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)

Two days ago Amnesty International launched a worldwide campaign to expose the systematic violation of human rights in China.

A launch that signalled the start of global campaigning in the months ahead by Amnesty members in more than 70 countries and territories.

Months of public demonstrations, petition signing and lobbying of governments including at the United Nations.

In short, we will be pulling out all the stops to put pressure on governments, inter-governmental organizations and the business community to take concrete action to bring about real changes in the human rights situation in China.

In the past, the Chinese government's reaction to Amnesty has been nothing short of hostile.

And yesterday's reaction to our campaign was no different.

A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman said that the report was “not even worth refutation” and charged us with trying to smear China's image by staging our campaign in the region.

We are not interested in rhetoric from the Chinese government -- we are interested in dialogue.

But they won't meet us in Beijing, and they wouldn't meet us in Bangkok.

The can close their doors to us, but they can't silence us.

Two members of our delegation were detained two days ago in Bangkok in an effort to prevent our press conference, but we still spoke out.

Some 40 riot police prevented us from delivering our report to the Chinese Embassy in Bangkok two days ago, so we sent it though the mail.

As Amnesty members around Asia and the world take up this campaign, there may be other attempts to silence us. Other governments may help to shelter China from international criticism, but they will not stop us.

And Amnesty will keep putting pressure on the Chinese government to bring about radical changes in the human rights situation.

In China, no one is safe from human rights violations.

The Chinese authorities have created swathes of repressive legislation to detain or intimidate political opponents, human rights defenders, members of religious and ethnic groups and others.

And vague laws open to interpretation are used as a weapon to achieve the exact same ends.

Unless this whole apparatus is overhauled, no one in China will be safe.

No one will be safe in China as long as the rule of law is subordinated to higher political goals.

Laws against “counter-revolutionary” activities or groups are used against those who are perceived as a threat to the established order.

State security laws have been used to imprison political opponents or journalists who “leak” or publish information critical of the state or the party.

No one will be safe as long as vague and contradictory provisions of the law open the door to arbitrariness and abuse of power and when exceptions built into the laws become the rule.

Like the provision that prosecutions must take place within five-and-a-half months of arrest except in ill-defined “complex cases”.

No one will be safe as long as administrative detention is used at the whim of those in positions of power.

When rural migrants and political dissidents are held without charge or trial for up to three months -- with China’s own ministry of public security admitting that some 900,000 people are arrested and detained this way each year.

No one will be safe in China as long as the court system is open to political interference.

The practice of “verdict first, trial second” is the kind of justice meted out to anyone unfortunate enough to cross those in power. The President of the Supreme Court himself said that the courts are being “led by the Party”.

In China, no one is safe. But this does not have to be the case.

Because laws can be amended, the rule of law can be entrenched, officials and perpetrators can be held accountable, and human rights violations can be prevented.

In our campaign, we will also be calling on the business community to use their leverage in bringing about change.

Because the arbitrary use and abuse of the law poses a major threat not only to human rights but also to the development and growth of a safe and sound business environment.

The business community therefore has a vested interest in pressing for a legal environment that will conform to international standards, not just in matters of trade but also in matters of human rights protection.

Because contempt for the rule of law will not distinguish between the different fields of human and social interactions.

Besides, Amnesty believes that business in China stands to benefit from greater transparency, less arbitrariness and a strengthened rule of law.

Systematic human rights violations, as history has shown, lead to political instability and rebellion and ultimately endangers investments. According to John Kamm*, promoting human rights in China is simply good business.

Amnesty is calling on all business leaders investing, trading and producing in China to take a hard look at the facts that we are presenting in our report and to assess them against the long term moral and financial interests of their shareholders.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights indeed calls not only on governments but also on “all individuals and organs of society” to work for the protection and promotion of human rights.

Business leaders today exercise an enormous influence and are a role model in most societies.

This influence must be put at the service of the broader community.

Extending human rights protection to all is part of that social responsibility.

This would be the expectation of shareholders, consumers, and all those associated one way or another with the individual companies.

Business leaders and investors around the world, and of course here in Hong Kong, can and should engage in human rights dialogue with Chinese officials.

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*[businessman and former President of the American Chamber of commerce in Hong Kong]