

54/96

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CHINA: BUSINESSES INVESTING IN CHINA SHOULD NOT IGNORE HUMAN RIGHTS

HONG KONG -- At a press conference today, Amnesty International called on businesses and governments investing in China not to put money before lives, but to live up to their responsibility to promote and protect human rights.

Pierre Sané, Secretary General of Amnesty International, also condemned attempts to silence the organization's message on China. This followed the detention of Amnesty International delegates in Bangkok to launch a worldwide campaign on human rights in China.

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

Amnesty International dispelled a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman's comments that the organization's findings were "not even worth refutation", and that it harboured deep prejudices against China.

"We are not interested in rhetoric from the Chinese government -- we are interested in dialogue," Pierre Sané said.

Amnesty International said that it holds no prejudice against the Chinese people. It is campaigning against the human rights violations reported by Chinese people themselves and pressing for reforms that will benefit all of China's citizens.

The Chinese authorities' response to Amnesty International's campaign is typical of China's stonewalling on its human rights record, Amnesty International said. The Chinese government steadfastly refuses to countenance legitimate international scrutiny, or to take seriously criticism of its human rights record.

Mr Sané called on businesses based in Hong Kong and the rest of the world which invest in China to use their enormous influence to help the broader community within the country, which he said was their social responsibility and ultimately in their own interest.

"Contempt for the rule of law will not distinguish between the different fields of human and social interactions," he said. "Arbitrariness and the abuse of the law pose a major threat not only to human rights but also to the development and growth of a safe and sound business environment."

"All business leaders investing, trading and producing in China should take a hard look at the facts in our report and assess them against the long term moral and financial interests of shareholders," he said.

Amnesty International's campaign highlights the massive human rights violations which persist in China, despite economic reforms. The Chinese government allows torture to continue, uses the death penalty to try to cure social problems, brutally cracks down on ethnic groups calling peacefully for

2

more independence, and detains hundreds of thousands of people every year without charging them with any crime.

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