

246/95

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CHINA: WEI JINGSHENG SENTENCE A MOCKERY OF JUSTICE

The trial of China's leading dissident, Wei Jingsheng, was a mockery of justice and his sentence is an outrage, Amnesty International said today.

"Today's verdict and harsh sentence shows the authorities's determination to silence Wei Jingsheng for a long time and to intimidate other potential critics into silence," the human rights organization said.

"Wei Jingsheng has been imprisoned simply for expressing his views peacefully and should be immediately released."

Wei Jingsheng was sentenced today to 14 years' imprisonment plus three years deprivation of political rights on a charge of "conspiring to overthrow the government". His trial lasted about five hours.

Though the authorities declared the trial was "open", foreign journalists and diplomats were barred from entering the courtroom by dozens of police surrounding the court. They were also prevented from taking photographs outside the court.

His sentence, despite sustained international appeals for his release, shows the authorities' contempt for international opinion. At a time when China is increasingly playing an active role in global affairs and at the United Nations, the government still chooses to ignore international human rights standards and reacts to its critics in the way it did 15 years ago.

"This kind of sentence for a high profile critic, who did nothing that could be considered 'criminal' under international standards, sets the clock back to where China was when it first sentenced Wei Jingsheng to 15 years' imprisonment in 1979," Amnesty International said.

According to a Chinese court spokesman, Wei's relatives, his lawyers, some Chinese journalists and "citizens" attended today's hearing at Beijing No.1 Intermediate People's Court. Those allowed to attend are believed to have been selected in advance by the authorities, as is the case in all such "open" political trials.

**BACKGROUND**

At the trial, Wei Jingsheng pleaded not guilty, stating that all his activities had been within Chinese law. He was accused of both investing and trying to raise money to fund

articles and activities “aimed at overthrowing the government”. According to reports, this referred in particular to Wei’s attempts to raise funds for the families of victims of the 1989 massacre in Beijing, which included plans to hold an art exhibition in China. His contacts with other dissidents were also cited as proof of his “reactionary” activities.

The prosecution apparently cited in evidence several letters and articles he had written both while serving his first prison sentence and during the six months he was free before his re-arrest in April 1994. According to an *AFP* report from Beijing today, this included a letter Wei Jingsheng addressed from prison to leader Deng Xioping on the question of Tibet.

After nearly 20 months in detention, notification that Wei Jingsheng was to be tried came less than two weeks before the date of the trial, leaving his family only days to appoint a lawyer. As of 12 December, the day before the trial, his family had not yet been given a copy of the indictment or even been allowed to see him.

The Beijing Public Procuratorate formally indicted Wei Jingsheng on 1 December 1995. On 3 December Wei Jingsheng’s sister, Wei Ling, was told by the Court that she should find her brother a lawyer and that the trial would take place within about two weeks. This gave the family only days to find a lawyer to represent Wei Jingsheng and to prepare a defence against the serious charge of “engaging in activities in an attempt to overthrow the government”. Furthermore, the family was reportedly only informed on 8 December that the trial would take place on 13 December.

Prior to his trial Wei Jingsheng was being held in Banbuqiao detention centre, within Beijing No.1 prison.

Amnesty International considers Wei Jingsheng to be a prisoner of conscience who is being held for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression and association. It is calling again for his immediate and unconditional release. The organization also calls on the international community to protest against the denial of proper time and facilities for Wei Jingsheng to prepare his defence adequately.

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