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China: Release Liu Xiaobo immediately

(Hong Kong) After more than 14 days of detention without approval of arrest, it now appears certain that Liu Xiaobo is considered a “major suspect”, according to Article 69 of the Chinese Criminal Procedure Law. Amnesty International today expressed fears that authorities are pursuing a serious prosecution against the literary critic and activist, a signatory of the Charter 08 campaign for political and rights reform.

Amnesty International urged the Chinese authorities to release Liu Xiaobo immediately.

Charter 08, initially signed by approximately 300 Chinese scholars, lawyers and officials, proposes a blueprint for fundamental legal and political reform in China, with the goal of a democratic system that respects human rights. Since the Charter 08 launch numerous signatories have been questioned and harassed by Chinese authorities but Liu Xiaobo remains the only known signatory in detention at this time.

"If Liu Xiaobo is to ultimately be charged with state security crimes, it would be yet another example of how Chinese authorities are using the criminal law to squash pleas for reform," said Roseann Rife, Deputy Director of Amnesty International's Asia Pacific Programme.

Liu Xiaobo was seized from his home in Beijing on 8 December, two days before the Charter 08 planned launch which was timed to coincide with the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on 10 December.

Amnesty International also called on the authorities to make public any information concerning his alleged crimes, the charges against him and his current whereabouts. It said that Liu Xiaobo should also be allowed full access to legal counsel of his choice.

In violation of the Criminal Procedure Law and the public security regulation regarding the procedures for handling criminal cases, the police failed to give his family information about where Liu was detained and to provide a detention notice within 24 hours. To date, his family-appointed lawyer has been unable to speak with Liu Xiaobo.

"The Chinese authorities must stop the ongoing harassment, detention, prosecution and imprisonment of Chinese human rights defenders and activists who peacefully exercise their constitutional rights to freedom of expression and association," said Roseann Rife. "We urge that they free Liu Xiaobo immediately."

Liu Xiaobo is a well-known scholar who was arbitrarily detained twice previously for his writings and his support of the democracy movement in 1989 and spent several years in detention.