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China: Tragedy of Tiananmen remains still alive

On the eve of the 16th anniversary of the crackdown on the 1989 pro-democracy movement in Beijing, Amnesty International calls for justice for those who lost their lives on June 3-4, who remain in prison since then for their involvement in these tragic events, and who have subsequently been imprisoned for their calls for a reassessment of the events of 1989.

"Tiananmen clearly remains very much alive today for the Chinese public and the demands by Chinese citizens for justice continue," said Amnesty International.

"We reiterate call on the Chinese government to conduct an independent inquiry into the killing of unarmed students and demonstrators. Those found responsible should be tried and brought to justice. We also call on the government to release all those who are still imprisoned in connection with the Tiananmen crackdown and who never received fair trials."

The government must stop new arrests and harsh treatment of individuals who express their views and share information on the internet and elsewhere regarding Tiananmen.

Background

Chinese leaders have taken the position that foreign concerns regarding the 1989 crackdown on unarmed citizens are "outdated".

However, there is, unfortunately, no better testimony to the on-going passion surrounding the issue than the continuous string of detentions and sentencing of citizens who seek to post information on the internet regarding the dead or missing from 1989, to facilitate communication among citizens with regard to the events of 1989, and who in other ways keep the issue alive in the minds of Chinese citizens.

Numerous Chinese citizens have been detained and imprisoned for such activities. To name only a few:

Shi Tao: a writer and journalist, was sentenced on April 30, 2005 to 10 years imprisonment for providing an overseas Web site with an official document alerting journalists to possible social instability around the 15th anniversary of the Tiananmen crackdown. He was charged with "illegally revealing state secrets abroad."

Kong Youping, a former trade union activist was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment in September

2004 after he had posted articles and poems on the internet calling for a reassessment of the 1989 pro-democracy movement.

Huang Qi, was sentenced in 2003 to 5 years imprisonment for hosting an online discussion forum on Tiananmen and human rights abuses by the Chinese government.

The Tiananmen Mothers (set up by Ding Zilin after her son was killed in Beijing on June 4, 1989) have never ceased to call for an independent review of the events of 1989 or to seek justice for the 126 relatives whose loved ones were killed, despite persistent harassment and intimidation including periodic detention and house arrest by the authorities in an effort to prevent them from exercising their legal rights.

Furthermore, the outpouring of emotion among Chinese citizens at the death of Zhao Ziyang, former Secretary General of the CCP, with hundreds mourning and seeking to show their final respect, shows that Tiananmen is still an issue alive with the Chinese people.

The fact that international opinion still considers the events of 1989 and China's human rights record today of relevance was recently demonstrated in the EU's decision in May of this year not to lift its embargo on arms sales to China. EU ministers specifically pointed to the need for the release of individuals still held in prison for their involvement in Tiananmen, along with other improvements in human rights such as reform of the Chinese system of detention without trial known as 'Re-education through Labour'.

Moreover, as Chinese premier Wen Jiabao himself stated in New Delhi on 12 April 2005, "only a country that respects history, takes responsibility for history and wins over the trust of peoples in Asia and the world at large can take greater responsibilities in the international community."

Only by following their own advice and addressing past and present injustices will the Chinese authorities win the trust of its citizens and the respect of the international community.

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