



amnesty international news release

AI Index: ASA 17/40/91

Distr: SC/PO

INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT
1 Easton Street London WC1X 8DJ
United Kingdom

INTERNATIONAL EMBARGO:

0001 hrs gmt Tuesday 4 June 1991

CHINA: CRACKDOWN ON PRO-DEMOCRACY ACTIVISTS CONTINUES IN COURTS AND JAILS

Amnesty International said today the continuing crackdown on China's pro-democracy activists had resulted in some of the harshest jail sentences of recent years.

The worldwide human rights organization said little-known activists were bearing the brunt of the repression that has already seen more than 1,000 people jailed.

"It's not uncommon for people out of the spotlight -- ordinary activists or those tried outside Beijing -- to be jailed for 10 to 20 years, sometimes simply for making dissident speeches," Amnesty International said.

The organization today published a list with details about more than 300 activists and others sentenced since 4 June 1989. Hundreds more apparently are serving long sentences after secret trials or were secretly executed by firing squads in the aftermath of the protests.

"The international community's criticism of China's human rights record has become muted," Amnesty International said, "but the abuses themselves have never stopped."

The organization said some of the widely publicized sentences handed down earlier this year on protest leaders were relatively lenient, but those understate the true severity of this latest stage in the repression of people involved in the democracy movement. For example, Chen Lantao -- a prisoner of conscience who in the past was criticized by the authorities for advocating political reforms -- was sentenced in Shandong province to 18 years in prison for joining in the 1989 protests.

In a separate report covering human rights violations in China over the past two years, the organization said that hundreds of those pro-democracy activists were detained for months or over a year before even being charged and that thousands more are probably still in prisons and detention centres without anyone knowing where they are.

☎ (44)(71) 413 5500 Telegrams: Amnesty London WC1 Telex: 28502 (FAX: 956 1157)

Amnesty International is an independent worldwide movement working impartially for the release of all prisoners of conscience, fair and prompt trials for political prisoners and an end to torture and executions. It is funded by donations from its members and supporters throughout the world. It has formal relations with the United Nations, Unesco, the Council of Europe, the Organization of African Unity and the Organization of American States.

"Those people who do actually get to the courtroom have faced a trial system so seriously flawed that it comes nowhere near international standards," Amnesty International said. Defendants often cannot choose their lawyers, they are not given enough time to prepare their defence -- and the verdict is often decided beforehand. In the case of Chen Ziming, officially described as one of the "masterminds" of the protests, the trial was barely finished when the verdict was announced in January of this year.

The chance of activists and others getting a fair trial has become even more remote since 1989 as political authorities have increased their interference in the courtroom. In the past two years, Chinese officials have stressed the need for courts to follow the Communist Party line and during a crime crackdown judges were told that death sentences should be meted out "without pity" and cases should be handled "rapidly".

While many of the people sentenced on political grounds in recent years were involved in the pro-democracy movement, religious leaders and Tibetan independence activists have also been caught in the sweeping repression. Thousands of Tibetan nationalists have been detained without trial for months at a time since 1987 and at least 200 are known to still be held in the capital. Arrests of religious leaders also increased in 1990 -- more than 30 Roman Catholic bishops, priests and lay leaders were arrested after attending an unofficial conference.

As well as political prisoners jailed or killed in the past two years, criminal prisoners have also been executed by firing squads in extremely large numbers. Last year, Amnesty International recorded more than 960 death sentences and 750 executions carried out as part of an official anti-crime campaign. That number is the highest since 1983, although Amnesty International believes the actual number of both death sentences and executions is in the thousands.

EMBARGOED FOR 0001 HRS GMT TUESDAY 4 JUNE 1991