

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

TIANANMEN - 12 YEARS ON

THE TIANANMEN MOTHERS - CAMPAIGNING FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

*"People see life as joy and light; death as fear and darkness.
But on the scales of human worth, life and death balance
each other. Without understanding the heaviness of death,*

*Jiang Peikun, Ding Zilin's husband. Their son
died on the night of 3 June 1989.*

THE CRACKDOWN ON THE PRO-DEMOCRACY DEMONSTRATORS

The pro-democracy protests started in Beijing in April 1989 and spread quickly to other major cities. The protesters demands included an end to official corruption and calls for political reforms, drawing unprecedented wide public support - millions of people joined peaceful demonstrations throughout China. By May 1989 the pro-democracy movement attracted people from various sectors of society, mainly workers, government employees and intellectuals, as well members of the police and the armed forces.

As it appears from reports of the time, including records reportedly smuggled from the Chinese Communist Party's archives and recently published in "The Tiananmen Papers"¹, ever since the demonstrations started in mid-April 1989, reformers and hardliners at the highest levels of the Chinese Communist Party were locked in a complex debate which plunged the leadership into a deep crisis that ended with the forced replacement of some of the top reformist leaders (willing to enter into dialogue with students) and with the imposition of martial law in Beijing at the end of May 1989.

This ended with the massacre in Beijing on the night of 3 to 4 June 1989 when the army moved from the suburbs of the city towards the centre to "clear" Tiananmen Square. Hundreds of unarmed civilians, including children and old people, were shot dead by troops firing at random or intentionally into protesters and onlookers, and in some cases tanks rolled over those that could not get away.

Others were summarily shot and killed by soldiers during the days which followed when troops were already in full control of Beijing. Many of the killings of unarmed civilians were extrajudicial

¹ *The Tiananmen Papers: The Chinese Leadership's Decision To Use Force Against Their Own People--In Their Own Words*, compiled by Zhang Liang, edited by Andrew J. Nathan and Perry Link, with an afterword by Orville Schell - published by Little, Brown & Company UK

executions- deliberate killings by government forces acting outside the limits of the law. Troops deliberately shot and killed individuals even when there were not immediate threat of violence by them, in violation of international standards that lethal force should only be used when absolutely necessary and in direct proportion to the legitimate objective it is intended to achieve.

An official report issued by the Chinese authorities at the end of June 1989 claimed that "more than 3,000 civilians were wounded and over 200, including 36 college students, died during the riot".²

Amnesty International believes that at least several hundred people were killed in Beijing during the military intervention and tens of thousands arrested in the aftermath of the crackdown throughout China.

Many of those detained were tortured or ill-treated by the police or soldiers during and in the aftermath of the military crackdown and some continued to be tortured over an extended period of time while in prison, often with devastating long term effects on their physical and mental health.

² *Report presented to the National People's Congress by the then Beijing's Mayor Chen Xitong on 30 June 1989.*

Some of those arrested were summarily executed a few days after being sentenced to death for their involvement in the protests. Many others were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment after unfair trials.

Amnesty has records of more than 200 people who are still imprisoned or on medical parole for their activities during the 1989 protests. None of them received fair trials. Many were convicted of "counter-revolutionary" crimes which are no longer crimes under the Criminal Law (revised in 1997). Their cases were never reviewed.

Some who were sentenced to death with a two-year suspension of execution after grossly unfair trials, had their sentences commuted to terms of life imprisonment for their involvement in the 1989 protests.

Moreover every year dissidents continue to be imprisoned or sent to labour camps for peacefully commemorating the anniversary of the 1989 crackdown.

THE GOVERNMENT'S POSITION

Twelve years after the 1989 massacre, despite appeals from the families of victims and the international community, the Chinese government continues to ignore pleas for justice, has taken no step to institute a public inquiry to account for the killings, grant compensation to the families of those killed and injured, or review

the cases of those imprisoned for their activities in 1989. It still refuses to reconsider the official "verdict" given at the time that the 1989 protests were a "counter-revolutionary riot" that had to be crushed, a decision used to justify the order to open fire on protesters and the brutal suppression that followed.

In a recent statement, the Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan reiterated that " with regard to the political disturbance in 1989 in Beijing, China has made a correct historical conclusion that will not be changed", and that "if China had not taken effective measures at that time, there would not have been the good situation of the development and stability China is enjoying today".

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BRINGING PERPETRATORS TO JUSTICE

The Chinese government has so far failed to bring to justice and punish those responsible for the violations of human rights that occurred during the events of June 1989 and in the crackdown that followed.

Impunity denies the victims and their relatives the right to have the truth established and acknowledged, the right to see justice done and the right to an effective remedy and to reparation. It prolongs the original hurt by seeking to deny that the abuses ever took place - a further affront to the dignity of the victims. Punishing perpetrators is also essential to uphold the rule of law and as a test of accountability on the part of the authorities.

Human rights defenders play a crucial role in promoting and protecting human rights. Often they do so by putting their own personal safety at risk, by documenting and exposing human rights violations, and holding governments accountable. In

³ *Xinhua News Service, 6 March 2001.*

many countries, including China, such people are suppressed, detained and imprisoned.

In China a network of more than 130 families of the victims of the 1989 massacre have courageously continued to campaign for justice, despite persistent government intimidation and persecution. They have repeatedly called on the Chinese government to institute a public and impartial inquiry and to grant compensation to the families of those killed or injured, publicly challenging the government's position, working to gather details of the deaths and providing support to each other, including by distributing humanitarian funds to assist the injured and the families of the dead.

The group is known as *"The Tiananmen Mothers"* and its main spokeswoman is Ding Zilin, a senior academic and bereaved mother who soon after the massacre courageously decided to break the silence. She started a journey of documenting the death of hundreds of those killed and in doing so she has reclaimed the right to memory.

As another anniversary approaches, the Mothers are again calling on the government to bring those responsible for the killings to justice, and provide compensation for the victims and their families

THOSE WHO WILL NEVER FORGET

"A person can make many different choices. I made the choice of documenting death". "I have scaled a mountain of corpses and I have floated in the tears of the victim's families".

The suffering of the victims' families continues as they are reminded at every anniversary of the fateful day when their child, husband, wife or other relative died.

Ding Zilin's son, **Jiang Jielian**, was born in Beijing on 2 June 1972 and had only just passed his 17th birthday when he died. He was a high school student at Beijing People's University. At around 11.10 pm on 3 June 1989, he was killed behind a flower bed on the north side of Fuwai Street, at Muxidi in Beijing, as the army was advancing towards the centre of the city. A bullet hit him from behind and passed through his heart. His ashes are kept at a mourning alter in his home.

Soon after the massacre Ding Zilin and her husband Jiang Peikun came into contact with other families also faced with loss. **Zhang Xianling** was the first mother to come forward to share the anguish of the death of her son Wang Nan.

On 4 June 1989, at 3.30 am, **Wang Nan**, a 19 years old high school student, was shot by a bullet which hit him in the head in Nanchang Street, south of Tiananmen Square. The medical emergency team was prevented by the troops from giving him emergency treatment. He died three hours later. A few days later Wang Nan's body was dug out from a pit near the square; it had started decomposing and was infested with maggots.

In the absence of any official recognition of their bereavement and thus of any right to mourn publicly, Ding Zilin and Zhang Xialiang felt compelled to search for the truth. They soon turned their grief into action, determined not to let those events fall into oblivion. They decided to search for other victims's families and within a few months a small network of relatives of those killed or injured was established. With great difficulties, often facing harassment and arrest, they provided support to each other in gathering information and meticulously recorded the details of the victims and the circumstances of their death.

Over the years they have painstakingly compiled a list of more than 150 dead and 60 wounded giving names and other details of victims who ranged in age from nine to 61 years. Most were students aged 17 to 25. The list is nowhere near complete, but it is the most thorough record of the Tiananmen's victims available so far.

The accounts given by the relatives of the victims also reveal the threats and harassment they have suffered at the hands of the authorities in the years following the massacre.

Fang Zheng, a senior student of sport physiology in 1989, suffered the amputation of both his legs after a tank rolled over him in central Beijing during the night of 3/4 June 1989. He recalls the moments when

*the students were leaving the Square and the troops suddenly began firing tear gas towards the crowds from behind: "On a blink of an eye the tank was approaching the sidewalk and closing in on me. I threw myself to the ground and began to roll. But it was too late. My upper body fell between two treads of the tank, but both my legs were run over. The treads rolled over my legs and my pants, and I was dragged for a distance. I used all my strength to break free and to roll to the side of the road. At that time I lost consciousness. After the events my regular life was often disrupted by harassment by the Public Security Bureau. Public Security officers regularly come to my home and interrogate me, causing great difficulties for my life and business."*⁴

*Xu Jue, one of the brave mothers to come forward, describes the chaos in the hospitals where the body of her son Wu Xiangdong had been laid: "I was jolted by a huge noise, the sound of random shots which rattled the hospital windows. I later found out it was the citizenry resisting the efforts of the martial law troops to seize the bodies of victims. The hospital personnel tried to assist me, saying "Just look quickly and go right home - soldiers are coming in the evening to seize the bodies. They want to destroy the evidence."*⁵

⁴ "June Fourth Massacre -Testimonies of the wounded and the families of the dead", June 1999, supplement to China Rights Forum -Summer 1999, published by Human Rights in China.

⁵ *ibid.*

Zhao Long was 21 when he was killed at around 2.00 a.m. of 4 June 1989. His mother, Su Bingxian, who died recently, campaigned for many years with other mothers. Last year she was detained after being given a small donation and message of support from the wife of author Edgar Snow. Before her death, she reported how the families of victims were prevented by the authorities from keeping the ashes of their beloved in the cemetery: " In the first half of 1992, the police station sent someone to demand that we remove Long's ashes from Laoshan Cemetery. Otherwise they would dispose of them altogether. Although we protested vehemently, we were still not allowed to keep the ashes there. We could do nothing but take Long's ashes and keep them at home until today." ⁶

Sun Chengkang and Yu Qing have been subjected to restrictions and constant surveillance by the authorities since their son Sun Hui was shot dead during the crackdown on 4 June. " Since Sun Hui was killed, the authorities have strictly limited our movements. I have been prevented from making business trips. If we want to go out of town, we have to get advance approval from the security department. Our every word and every action have been under the scrutiny of the

⁶ *ibid.*

*neighbourhood committee. The authorities went so far as to send people to my landlord to tell him that we were political criminals. The landlord was too scared to lease us the house anymore."*⁷

⁷ *ibid.*

The relatives have been pressured to remain silent about the deaths of their loved ones, risking government reprisal if they speak out. They have been denied their right to mourn peacefully and in public. In the words of Yuan Kezhi, father of Yuan Li, who was 19 when he died at Muxidi in Beijing on 3 June 1989, "... each year on the Qing Ming Festival (Grave Sweeping Day) when people hold memorial ceremonies for 4 June victims buried at Wanan Cemetery, we are under surveillance by the military and plainclothes police, and this kind of psychological trauma doubles the effects of wounds caused by our losses. We have lost hope of finding peace in our old age." ⁸

In describing her son's death Zhou Shuzhuang expresses the hope for change that was so brutally ended when the tanks rolled into central Beijing. "*Duan Changlong did not die from disease or in a car accident, but for love of his country. He died in the belief that "everyone is responsible for the rise and fall of his own nation."*⁹

As the driving force behind these efforts to document the truth, Ding Zilin has been the target of persistent persecution by the Chinese authorities. She has been repeatedly harrassed, detained, put under constant surveillance, and yet she still lives in Beijing

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ *ibid.*

from where she continues to be active in campaigning for justice on behalf of the "Tiananmen Mothers".

CALLS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

In 1993 Ding Zilin was invited to speak as a representative of a non-governmental organization at the U.N. Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. Although she was prevented from leaving China by the Chinese authorities, she was able to present the Commission with a written statement making public her findings and demanding accountability.

Since then, The "Tiananmen Mothers" have petitioned the Chinese Procurator General and requested dialogue with the government. Their requests have never been answered. Instead the "Tiananmen Mothers" have faced short-term imprisonment, police harassment and loss of earnings. Overseas humanitarian donations earmarked for the victims's families have been frozen by the authorities.

In May 2000 the "Tiananmen Mothers" launched a global petition requesting the right to mourn peacefully and in public; the right to accept humanitarian aid; an end to the persecution of the victims of the massacre; the release of all people still imprisoned for their role in the 1989 protests; a full and open inquiry and an end to impunity for the perpetrators. The petition, also available on line at www.fillthesquare.org, is supported by Amnesty International, Human Rights in

China¹⁰ and other human rights organizations. The petition has been signed so far by over 20,000 people from over 60 countries.

"I dream of a day in China when the ideas of freedom, democracy, human sympathy, tolerance, and equality have pervaded people's hearts and minds and have radically transformed the patterns of social life. When that day comes, we can cease our tears, forget every painful memory,

In September 2000 survivors of the massacre residing in the USA filed a civil law suit in New York against Li Peng, who was Prime Minister of China at the time of the 1989 events and signed the

¹⁰ *Human rights in China (HRIC) is an independent organization focused on monitoring and promoting human rights in the People's Republic of China. Founded in 1989 by a group of Chinese scientists and scholars, HRIC maintains offices in New York and Hong Kong.*

order to impose martial law in Beijing in late May 1989. The lawsuit is based on US laws which allow victims of human rights abuses everywhere in the world to seek redress through US courts.

Li Peng, who is now Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (China's legislature), was on a visit to the USA for a U.N. Conference at the time the suit was filed.

The civil suit, seeking reparation for damages and loss of life, was filed by victims or relatives of victims of the 1989 crackdown¹¹. Four of the complainants were students leaders in 1989, who were hunted down by the Chinese authorities and imprisoned following the massacre. Wang Dan, Zhou Fengsuo, Liu Gang and Xiong Yang appeared in the "Most Wanted List" of 21 students leaders issued by the Ministry of Public Security shortly after 4 June 1989. The list was broadcast on Chinese television on 13 June 1989 and published in newspapers.

The complainants' claims against Li Peng include crimes against humanity, summary executions, torture, arbitrary detention and violation of the rights of peaceful assembly and association and of the right to life, liberty and security of person.

¹¹ They were aided by Human Rights in China and the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), which is a New York based, non-profit, public interest legal foundation dedicated to furthering and protecting the civil, constitutional, and human rights of the oppressed.

In a statement issued in October 2000 in support of the lawsuit against Li Peng, family members and victims in China reiterated their demand for justice and accountability and called on the United Nations to step up efforts to establish the International Criminal Court and to bring to justice members of States who have committed crimes against humanity.

The Chinese government has strongly criticised the lawsuit against Li Peng calling it “a political farce”. The case has now come to a standstill on a legal technicality and a new hearing is due to take place soon to establish whether the suit may be heard.

Amnesty International reiterates its call on the Chinese government to investigate the deaths that occurred during the 4 June 1989 crackdown on the pro-democracy protests and the other human rights violations which occurred in the aftermath of the massacre.

At the time of the twelfth anniversary, Amnesty International calls on the Chinese authorities:

- *to initiate an impartial and public enquiry into the killings of unarmed civilians and demonstrators in June 1989; to account for all people killed and injured; to grant compensation to the victims or their families and ensure that those responsible be brought to justice.*

Amnesty International reiterates its call to the Chinese authorities:

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- ❑ *to release immediately and unconditionally all those still imprisoned for taking part in the 1989 protests, expressing concern at the length of sentences imposed at the time and at the summary and unfair nature of their trials. It also calls for the release of people who were imprisoned in subsequent years for attempting to commemorate peacefully the victims of the 1989 crackdown.*

Amnesty International expresses its concerns

- ❑ *at the cases of political detainees being reportedly tortured and ill-treated in the aftermath of the crackdown on the 1989's pro-democracy movement, appealing to the authorities to impartially investigate all reported cases of torture and ill-treatment of political activists held in connection with the 1989 protests, and to ensure that officials alleged to have used torture are prosecuted.*

Amnesty International calls on the Chinese authorities:

- ❑ *for the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience and for a review of the cases of all other political prisoners who should either be granted a new trial, held in accordance with international standards, or released.*

