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China: White paper or whitewash?

The new White Paper released by Beijing in defence of its human rights record is more significant for what it leaves out than for what it reveals, Amnesty International pointed out today.

"The paper makes much of guarantees of basic rights, such as rights to free speech, association and religious belief contained in China's constitution, but it fails to mention that these have become paper guarantees."

"Constitutional rights have been severely proscribed by newer laws or are simply not delivered in practice," the human rights organisation said. "The White Paper does not address the question of why these rights are violated, and why such violations are allowed to continue."

Identifying government policies, repressive legislation and abuse of power as the main causes of human rights violations in China, the human rights organisation pointed out that the White Paper was silent on these issues.

"The White Paper seeks to explain away shortcomings in Beijing's human rights record by arguing that China is still a developing country and is limited by impediments of natural, historical and economic development."

"But this is a weak and unconvincing explanation for Beijing's failure to act decisively against torture, to allow thousands of people to be arbitrarily detained, to carry out unfair trials and to deny constitutional rights to critics and perceived opponents of the regime," Amnesty International said.

This White Paper, like previous ones, asserts development is the top priority for China, and that "development" and "stability" are the chosen "methods to promote and guarantee human rights" in China now and in the future.

"However, human rights abuses will not simply fade away with economic development. Any great leap forward requires a leap of political will, " Amnesty International. "The government must act to stop these abuses."

"The ongoing crackdown on peaceful dissent -- the most serious and widespread in China since 1989 -- is alienating and potentially destabilising for China," Amnesty International said.

"So, indeed, are corruption and abuse of power, issues that find no mention in the White Paper." ENDS.../

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