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**CHINA: WORLD CAN NO LONGER IGNORE HUMAN RIGHTS OF 1.2. BILLION PEOPLE**

**BANGKOK:** The endemic repression of dissent and abuse of law in China are being overshadowed by the drive to exploit the world's largest emerging market, Amnesty International said today as it launched a worldwide campaign on human rights violations in China.

"Economic reforms have not been matched by essential human rights reforms in China," said Pierre Sané, Secretary General of Amnesty International. "The harsh reality is that repression has increased in recent years and the government continues to brutally clamp down on anything it perceives as a threat to the established order."

Despite sporadic international protest over human rights violations -- most recently in December 1995 with the sentencing of leading activist Wei Jingsheng -- other governments have failed to condemn consistently human rights violations in fear of jeopardizing investment opportunities.

"The fact that the international community is ignoring the fundamental human rights of a fifth of the world's population sends a worrying message about global commitment to human rights," said Mr Sané.

The Chinese authorities do not tolerate any form of dissent. They allow torture to continue, use the death penalty to try to cure social problems, brutally crackdown on ethnic groups calling peacefully for more independence, and detain hundreds of thousands of people every year without charging them with any crime.

"Until now, the Chinese Government has used its influence to block international criticism," Mr Sané said. "Despite clear evidence of systematic violations in China, many governments have acted in their own self-interest, only too happy to accept China's position that its human rights record should not be held up to international scrutiny."

A major theme of Amnesty International's campaign is the arbitrary way in which Chinese officials use and abuse their country's laws. In a 110-page report, titled "*No One Is Safe*", the organization details various aspects of this abuse of power by officials who know that they can act with impunity.

Repression touches not only political dissidents, but also people from other walks of life including business people, children and members of religious groups.

One of the worst aspects of this abuse is the widespread use of torture. Victims include people who are not suspected of any crime, but who become involved in disputes with officials or attempt to defend their rights. The lack of effective safeguards mean that anyone can be at risk.

In 1995 for example, a police officer in Liaoning province tortured four teenage girls and two young men to make them “confess” to “promiscuous behaviour”. He then demanded a large sum of money from their families as a condition for release.

Any prisoner faces the risk of torture. Methods include severe beatings, suspension by the arms and whippings. According to China’s own official press, many victims die as a result of torture, while others are left permanently disabled. Although some forms of torture are prohibited by national law, few perpetrators are punished.

Torture using electro-shock weapons is common, with batons applied to the feet, armpits, genitals, and inside the mouth or vagina. Some of these batons were exported to China from other countries.

The authorities increasingly use the death penalty as a tool to try to deal with social problems. The death penalty is now applicable to an estimated 68 offences, many of them non-violent crimes. More people are executed in China every year than in the rest of the world put together. Amnesty International recorded over 3200 death sentences and 2100 executions in 1995, although the organization believes the real figures to be much higher.

The death penalty is used arbitrarily, often as a result of political interference. Executions regularly take place before major festivals or events, including the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, or as part of “law and order” campaigns.

Death sentences are frequently announced at “mass sentencing rallies”, where condemned prisoners are paraded like cattle before crowds of spectators before being taken to the execution ground.

“No one is presumed innocent until proven guilty in China, and in many cases verdicts are decided before the trial has even taken place,” Mr Sané said. “The authorities routinely flout international safeguards against miscarriages of justice, by basing convictions on confessions extracted under torture, denying legal representation to some defendants and bringing them to trial without advance warning.”

The authorities use the law as a tool of political repression, to silence dissidents and people seen as a threat to the established order. Members of ethnic groups live under the shadow of repressive rules that deny them the right to express peacefully their national, religious or cultural aspirations.

Thousands of Tibetans have been detained and many tortured for peacefully expressing their views. Buddhist monks and nuns of all ages from 13 to 83 have been jailed for activities such as displaying the Tibetan national flag, possessing books about the Dalai Lama or shouting pro-independence slogans.

Members of religious groups who carry out peaceful religious activities outside government control have been detained and tortured. Often they have to pay fines to corrupt officials to secure their release, and some have had their houses destroyed by police.

Political dissidents are among hundreds of thousands of people arbitrarily detained each year without being charged with a crime. A system of administrative detention allows the authorities to imprison anyone they wish for months or years without charge. According to official statistics, in some areas only 10% of those detained under one form of administrative detention have actually committed a crime.

China has begun to play an increasingly prominent role in global affairs, including at the United Nations. But it has failed to accept the responsibilities and obligations that come with international citizenship in the area of human rights. Rather than taking concrete steps to protect human rights, the Chinese government appears to be more concerned with deflecting criticism and avoiding accountability at the international level. The international community has not held China to account for this. While violations continue on a massive scale, the UN Commission on Human Rights has never passed a resolution condemning human rights violations in China. ENDS