

URGENT ACTION

UIGHUR ACADEMIC SENTENCED TO LIFE

Prominent Uighur scholar, Ilham Tohti, was sentenced to life imprisonment on 23 September in China. He is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression as an academic and writer. According to his lawyers, he was denied food for 10 days and has had his feet shackled in detention.

Ilham Tohti, 45, an economics professor, founder of Uighur Online website and an outspoken critic of Beijing's policies on Uighurs, was sentenced to life imprisonment for "separatism" by Urumqi City Intermediate People's Court in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) on 23 September. This charge has often been used against Uighurs who speak out against human rights violations. He was also sentenced to deprivation of his political rights for life, and the court ordered that all his assets be confiscated.

Ilham Tohti was first taken away from his home in Beijing by public security officers on 15 January. He was held incommunicado for about six months, and according to his lawyers, he was denied food for 10 days and had his feet shackled for over 20 days. His feet were again shackled during the most recent meeting with his lawyers on 4 September. His lawyers did not have access to all the evidence against him, and were only allowed to meet with him for the first time after he had been detained for five months.

Ilham Tohti has been commenting on the situation of Uighurs in China for many years. His "Uighur Online" website reported human rights violations suffered not only by Uighurs but also by ethnic Han Chinese. The website has been shut down by the authorities several times. Uighurs are a Turkic ethnic minority who have been the target of systematic and extensive human rights violations, including arbitrary detention and imprisonment, incommunicado detention, and serious restrictions on religious freedom as well as cultural and social rights.

Police arrested seven Uighur students along with Ilham Tohti in January 2014. They face a similar charge of "separatism", although it is unclear when their trials will take place.

Many thanks to all those who took action. We will continue to campaign for Ilham Tohti through other means, but at this time no more action is required from the UA Network.

This is the third update of UA 18/14. Further information: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA17/038/2014/en>

Name: Ilham Tohti

Gender m/f: Male

Further information on UA: 18/14 Index: ASA 17/051/2014 Issue Date: 25 September 2014

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