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China: Detention of Tiananmen Mothers

Amnesty International condemns the detention of three "Tiananmen Mothers" Ding Zilin, Zhang Xianling and Huang Jinping on 28 March and calls for their immediate and unconditional release. The "Tiananmen Mothers" have for years peacefully campaigned on behalf of their children and other relatives killed almost 15 years ago when troops violently broke up the 1989 pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square. The teenage sons of Ding Zilin and Zhang Xinliang, and Huang Jinpin's husband were killed. Hundreds of other protestors were also killed.

The three were arbitrarily detained in an apparent attempt to stop them or warn them against commemorating the 15th anniversary of the 1989 pro-democracy protests.

The detention of the three "Tiananmen Mothers" comes a few days before the Chinese government's release on 30 March of a white paper on human rights in China for the year 2003 claiming that China had made "landmark progress" in protecting human rights and two weeks before the European Union (EU) is due to discuss lifting the arms embargo on China put in place immediately after 4 June 1989.

Senior Chinese officials have described the EU arms embargo on China as "a relic of the cold-war". Some EU member-states have also called for the embargo to be lifted, claiming that improvements in China's human rights record and China's new leadership, which is not directly implicated in the events of 4 June, make the embargo unnecessary.

In Amnesty International's view the arbitrary detention of three women closely associated with the events of 4 June 1989 is indicative that the Chinese government is still to fully address the concerns in China and abroad over the events of 4 June 1989. This is underlined by the fact that dozens of people remain in prison for participating in those protests. Reports that Ding Zilin, Zhang Xianling and Huang Jinping were arbitrarily detained having recorded interviews to be shown at the on-going meeting of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, confirms the Chinese government's continuing reluctance to address these concerns.

Amnesty International urges the Chinese government to abide by the recent constitutional amendment to "respect and protect human rights" and to release Ding Zilin, Zhang Xianling and Huang Jinping.