

## **Amnesty International Testimony**

China on the eve of the Olympics

Before the

House Foreign Affairs Committee  
United States Congress

Submitted by

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Amnesty International is pleased to submit this statement to this important hearing and we wish to express our appreciation for the steps several Members of Congress have taken to highlight human rights in China before the Olympics. The efforts of the Members of Congress stand in stark contrast to the tepid actions the Bush Administration has taken.

It is important to compare the human rights promises given by the Chinese authorities when they were bidding for the Olympics with the human rights conditions today to determine whether the Chinese authorities have honored their promises. It is also equally important to ask whether the Bush Administration has taken appropriate steps to secure human rights improvements before the Olympics.

Amnesty International has documented numerous human rights abuses committed by authorities in China that are being perpetrated because of the Olympics. There are pre-Olympics “clean-ups” resulting in several “Olympics prisoners.” There are also secret detention centers and Chinese activists are barred from talking to foreigners. We are also concerned about the rights of foreigners who will be going to Beijing to attend the Olympics.

### **Human rights in China before the Olympics was awarded:**

The scale of China’s human rights violations is staggering. A quarter of a million people are languishing in labor camps, imprisoned under the “re-education through labor” detention system, where they are detained without charge or trial at the whim of local police and other officials. China accounts for upwards of eighty percent of all executions documented in the world. China also executes

political prisoners. Torture by law enforcement personnel is endemic resulting in many prisoner deaths while in custody.

Thousands suffer brutal religious persecution and political repression. Religious persecution has led to the detention and repression of thousands of Christians, Tibetan Buddhists, Uighur Muslims and Falun Gong practitioners. Other targets of repression include political dissidents, trade union organizers, advocates of reform, and people using the internet to disseminate information deemed to be “politically sensitive.”

North Korean asylum seekers face intense repression and large scale forcible repatriation to North Korea. Women are still compelled to undergo forced abortion and sterilization to enforce the one-child policy. The government regularly denies the right to freedom of conscience, expression, religion and association.

### **Promises made by Chinese authorities to improve human rights if Beijing is awarded the Olympics:**

Authorities in China made several promises to improve human rights:

- 1) Secretary General of Beijing’s Olympics bid Committee, Wang Wei (July 2001): “We will give the media complete freedom to report when they come to China.” “We are confident that the Games coming to China not only promotes our economy but also enhances all social conditions, including education, health and human rights.”
- 2) Vice President of Beijing bid committee, Liu Jingmin. (April 2001): “By allowing Beijing to host the Games you will help the development of human rights.”
- 3) Mayor of Beijing Liu Qi: “By hosting the games, social progress and economic development in China would move forward, as would China’s human rights situation.”

### **Human rights in China since the awarding of the Olympics:**

The human rights situation in China has continued to deteriorate since the Olympics was awarded to Beijing in 2001. The crackdown on journalists, lawyers and human rights defenders has intensified since Beijing won the Olympics bid. Due to these crackdowns we see a new category of abused “Olympics prisoners” who would not have been in prison if not for the Olympics. The authorities have stepped up repression of dissent voices in their efforts to present an image of “stability” and “harmony” to the outside world, which includes human rights violations perpetrated in preparation for the Games.

Two recent crisis situations in west China have challenged the authorities to demonstrate that their human rights commitments are more than empty words.

The recent protests in Tibet and Tibetan-populated areas of surrounding provinces and the subsequent crackdown and media silence imposed by authorities highlighted not only longstanding and unresolved violations of fundamental human rights but also the on-going censorship of the media.

In contrast, the authorities initially responded to the effects of the devastating earthquake in Sichuan province with uncharacteristic openness, allowing relatively free media access to the region. However media control tightened as local families began public protests calling for accountability of local officials, especially with regard to the collapse of schools which were allegedly poorly constructed.

### Secret detention centers

In September 2007, reports emerged of secret detention centers established on the outskirts of the capital by Beijing liaison offices of provincial governments in China to detain petitioners before they could be forcefully returned to their hometowns. Petitioners were crowded into these facilities with poor food and no proper sanitation facilities or health care. Some sources also reported that guards often beat detainees.

### Activists barred from leaving or talking to foreigners

At the end of June 2008, Shanghai police sent notices to activists and petitioners based in the city ordering them to report to the police every week. Some were briefly detained by the police. The new rules barred them from leaving the city without permission and warned them against speaking to foreigners or visiting Beijing until after the Olympics.

### Labor Camps (Re-education through labor):

The Chinese authorities continue to rely on abusive systems of punitive administrative detention against a variety of “offenders” including, in many cases peaceful petitioners and human rights activists. The police enjoy unchecked authority to impose such punishments without charge, trial or judicial review. Far from acting as a catalyst for reform, the authorities have used Beijing’s hosting of the Olympics as a pretext for extending the use of punitive administrative detention, like “re-education through labor.” The police have specifically targeted petitioners and rights activists in their efforts to “clean up” Beijing ahead of the games.

On May 8, 2008, the Beijing city authorities decided that “Re-education through labor” would be used as a way to control various types of “offending behavior” to clean up the city’s image in the run-up to the Olympics. This would include serious cases of “unlawful advertising or leafleting, unlicensed taxis, unlicensed businesses, vagrancy and begging.”

### Plight of Chinese activists

Many human rights defenders continue to be detained, prosecuted and imprisoned as prisoners of conscience after politically motivated trials, while others are being held under “house arrest” as prisoners in their own homes.

As the Olympics approach, human rights defenders who attempt to report on violations, challenge policies which are deemed politically sensitive, or try to rally others to their cause face a series risk of abuse. Those who have made connections between human rights and the Olympics have been specifically targeted in the pre-Olympics “clean up.” The police have also used surveillance and arbitrary detention against members of activists’ families, in an apparent attempt to apply more pressure.

The authorities continue to use provisions of the Criminal Law as political tools to suppress dissent. Broadly defined categories of crimes, such as “separatism”, “subversion”, “disturbing public order”, endangering state security”, and “leaking state secrets” continue to be used to prosecute those engaged in legitimate and peaceful human rights activities.

### Plight of Chinese Lawyers

Many of those persecuted in the run up to the Olympics are lawyers and legal advisors who play a crucial role in securing the rule of law and the protection of human rights in any society. The vulnerability of Chinese lawyers was underscored in May 2008 when the authorities refused to renew the law licenses of Beijing – based lawyers Teng Biao and Jiang Tianyong. Both had signed their names to an open letter by 18 lawyers on April 3, 2008 offering free legal counsel to Tibetans arrested in connection with the recent crackdown.

According to one of those arrested lawyers, Chinese authorities warned the lawyers and their law firms not to get involved in Tibetan issues. Jiang Tianyong’s law license was eventually renewed at the end of June, but Teng Biao’s has not yet been renewed.

### Media and Internet freedom

In view of current patterns of media censorship and control in China, concerns remain that the authorities may seek to block broadcasting of any items deemed “sensitive” or “inappropriate” during the Olympic Games. Despite the introduction of new media regulations increasing the freedom of foreign reporters to cover news stories in China, overseas journalists continue to report being obstructed or hampered from conducting interviews. The Foreign Correspondence Club of China documented approximately 180 incidents in 2007. By July 2008, this had

increased to 230, including over 40 cases after the unrest in Tibet in March and more than 12 after the Sichuan earthquake in May.

#### Plight of Chinese journalists:

Chinese journalists continue to operate in a climate of official censorship and control, with many still languishing in jail for reporting on issues deemed politically sensitive. Internet controls have been increasingly tightened as the Olympics approach with control, regulation and censorship extending to various categories of internet users, including Internet Service Providers, bloggers and website owners. Numerous websites have been closed down for providing information deemed sensitive by the authorities. Internet users who post such information risk detention, prosecution, and imprisonment.

#### **Foreign Olympics visitors – rights restricted?**

On June 2, 2008 the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (BOCOG) published guidelines which risk violating the rights to freedom of expression and association of foreigners intending to visit China to attend the Olympics, including athletes, officials and other visitors.

The regulations state that foreigners must not “endanger state security, harm the rights and interests of society or disrupt social stability.” Foreign visitors are also prohibited from committing acts of “subversion” or other activities deemed to “endanger the national interest.” They are also warned not to bring into China any materials (including printed mater, DVDs, etc) which “harm China’s politics, economy, culture or morals” or to take any materials out of China whose contents “involve state secrets.” The guidelines also state that entry to China will be denied to anyone “considered likely to engage in activities which endanger state security and the national interest.”

The wording of such provisions parallels the vague and broad wording of state security offences in the Chinese Criminal Law which have long been used by the authorities to prosecute and imprison peaceful Chinese activists and prisoners of conscience in violation of their rights to freedom of expression.

The regulations also prohibit foreign visitors from displaying any “slogans”, banners or other materials of a religious, political or racial nature” in Olympic facilities. This appears to be based on Rule 51.3 of the Olympics Charter which bans “demonstrations or political, religious or racial propaganda in Olympic sites, venues or other areas.” However BOCOG’s guidelines contain an additional, broader prohibition on “the display of insulting slogans, banners or other materials to sporting venues.”

No definition is given to the word “insulting” but current practice suggests that it will be interpreted broadly to include anything which authorities deemed to be

offensive. The guidelines provide examples of “socially disruptive behavior” prohibited during “large scale public activities of a cultural or sporting nature.” The list includes “displaying insulting slogans, banners or other materials” as well as a catch-all category: “other behavior which disturbs the order of large-scale public activities.”

In view of this vague, sweeping wording, Amnesty International fears that the Chinese authorities will use these guidelines as a tool to curtail rights to freedom of expression of athletes, officials and other foreign visitors to China at the time of the Olympics. Anyone bringing in materials, or staging peaceful activities, which are critical of the Chinese authorities risks being targeted.

### **President Bush and the Olympics:**

There are only a little over two weeks left until the Olympic Games begin in Beijing on August 8, 2008. President Bush will be attending the opening ceremony and Secretary Rice will attend the closing ceremony. Their attendance shows the importance the Bush Administration is giving to the Beijing Olympics. We are concerned that the importance given by the Administration to the Olympic Games is not matched by the attention given to human rights abuses in China.

Amnesty International believes that the Bush Administration should have done more to improve human rights in China before the start of Olympics. As noted above, the human rights situation has worsened because of the Olympics and the Administration has not been forceful in addressing the situation.

There is still time for the Bush Administration to act. Amnesty International would like to recommend the following to President Bush to bring attention to human rights abuses in China even at this late stage.

### **Before President Bush leaves for the Olympics:**

- 1) President Bush should meet with the released political prisoners from China who are residing in the United States before he leaves for the Olympics. There are several Tibetan, Uighur, and other former prisoners in the US.
- 2) President Bush should make a strong public statement about human rights abuses in China and demand improvements.
- 3) President Bush should urge the Chinese Government to release some political prisoners and give commitments on the abolishment of labor camps (“Re-Education through labor detention system”) as a sign of good will before he arrives to attend the Olympic Games.

While President Bush is in Beijing for the Olympics:

- 1) President Bush should make a strong public statement on human rights and consider speaking at a University or other public places.
- 2) President Bush should meet with the foreign correspondents based in Beijing to discuss press freedom.

After President Bush returns from the Olympics:

President Bush should make a statement about human rights concerns in China and outline steps his administration has taken and will take to end the abuses.

Thank you for inviting Amnesty International.

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