

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 27, 2008

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Rice:

We wish to raise with you our growing concern over the lack of freedom of expression in China. We are alarmed that authorities in China have established a pervasive system of Internet censorship that blocks the free flow of information and ideas. They have used vaguely-worded laws to detain journalists, dissidents and others engaged in the peaceful exercise of their right to free expression, including those arrested for their legitimate use of the Internet. Although the right to freedom of expression is protected under China's constitution and under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which China has signed, authorities continue to detain people in apparent violation of both of these legal instruments.

Just one of the many unfortunate examples of this practice is the continuing imprisonment of **Shi Tao**, a journalist and poet who has been imprisoned solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression and his rights to seek, receive and impart information.

In April 2004, Mr. Shi sent an e-mail from his Yahoo! account to a United States-based pro-democracy website in which he summarized a government order directing media organizations in China to downplay the upcoming 15th anniversary of the Tiananmen crackdown. On the basis of this e-mail, police arrested Mr. Shi six months later in November 2004, charging him with "illegally providing state secrets to foreign entities." Using email account holder information supplied by Yahoo!, authorities sentenced Shi Tao to 10 years in prison in April 2005.

We urge you to call upon the Chinese authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Shi Tao and all others who have been jailed as a result of their legitimate use of the Internet. We ask you to press China's leaders to amend or repeal vaguely-worded laws or regulations that can be used to persecute individuals for simply exercising their right to freedom of expression.

Strong and vibrant societies are built upon the free exchange of information and diverse perspectives. We ask you to take every opportunity to share this message clearly and emphatically with our allies in China and elsewhere.

Sincerely,