



**International
Federation
of Journalists**
國際記者聯會

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IFJ Press Freedom in China Campaign

May 8 Bulletin

Three months until the Beijing Olympics

To IFJ Asia-Pacific affiliates and friends,

Welcome to the IFJ Asia-Pacific's monthly Press Freedom in China Campaign e-bulletin. This bulletin marks three months until the Beijing Olympic Games open on August 8. The next bulletin will be sent on **June 8, 2008** and contributions are most welcome.

To contribute news or information, email ifjchina@ifj-asia.org. To visit the IFJ's China Campaign page, go to www.ifj.org.

Please distribute this bulletin widely among colleagues in the media.

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1. Call for China to guarantee freedom of expression

A delegation from the Hong Kong Journalists' Association and the International Federation of Journalists, joined by Reporters Without Borders, World Association of Newspapers and PEN, marked World Press Freedom Day on May 3 by presenting a statement to China's Central Government Liaison Office in Hong Kong calling for press freedom. The statement demanded that the Government "implement laws and regulations from the central to the local government level that give practical and substantive meaning to the guarantee of freedom of expression enshrined in the Chinese constitution". The group also demanded that the Government unconditionally and immediately release all journalists and writers imprisoned in China. Following the presentation of the statement, the organisations led a protest through the streets of Hong Kong Island and Kowloon, concluding next to the Legislative Council.

2. Press freedom participants denied entry to Hong Kong

Hong Kong's immigration department barred several people from entering the territory on April 29 to attend press freedom seminars during the "One Dream: Free Expression in China" event organised by the HKJA and supported by the IFJ, Reporters Without Borders, WAN, several international PEN centres, and others. Those denied entry included Zhang Yu, coordinator of the Independent Chinese PEN Centre's (ICPC) Writers in Prison Committee; Zhao Dagong and Wen



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Kejian, members of ICPC; and Jens Galschiot, a Danish sculptor and protester. Zhang told seminar participants by phone link that he was detained in Hong Kong for about 10 hours on April 29. He was barred from entry, denied the right to appeal, and threatened with future refusals if he protested. All organisations involved in the event sent a formal protest to Jacques Rogge, President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), to express concern and ask the IOC to call on China's authorities to respect fully the promises made when Beijing secured the right to host the Games. Protests were also sent to Donald Tsang, Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, to demand a public explanation about the denial of entry.

3. Seminar promotes solidarity for press freedom in China

Several veteran and independent journalists, private publishers and bloggers from Hong Kong, mainland China and the global press freedom community attended the "One Dream" seminars in Hong Kong from May 1 to 2.

Zan Aizhong, an independent journalist, told the seminar that journalists lacked job security and their reports were suppressed by central and local governments. China's Central Publicity Department frequently tried to "bribe" journalists by arranging tours and soliciting advertisements in newspapers. Phone bugging, surveillance and physical attacks against journalists were common in provincial areas. However, Zan expressed some hope that press freedom in China would improve in coming years.

Jimmy Lai, Next Media tycoon and publisher of newspapers in Hong Kong and Taiwan, told the seminar and assembled reporters that "a moral vacuum is festering in China". Lai urged media companies to engage in business in China, as media invariably "carry with us our value system, our moral judgment, which is good for China". Lai condemned Hong Kong authorities' move to bar speakers from attending the seminar, but he expressed hope that global protests about the lack of civil freedoms in China would push the country to change.

Blogger Ran Yunfei told the seminar that many of his articles were deleted by "cyber policemen", while Ding Dong, private publisher, complained that in China the Government controlled the total number of publishers via licence fees, thus preventing independent publishing.

Defence lawyer Li Fangping, who acts for Hu Jia, imprisoned on April 3 for "inciting subversion of state power", said in a written submission to the seminar that the relevant law was so vague it could be used to trap people merely for exercising their constitutional right to freedom of expression. Li therefore demanded that China's Central Government amend the law in order to be consistent with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which China has signed but not ratified.

Veteran journalist Ching Cheong, released in February after serving almost three years of a five-year sentence on charges of "spying", made an impassioned plea to Hong Kong journalists to continue to spearhead demands for press freedom in China. Ching told journalists that Hong Kong had always played a special role in promoting human rights improvements within China, and that Hong Kong journalists must be "facilitators" of freedom while also fighting to preserve Hong Kong's special status. "First of all, I am a Chinese person, then I am a Hong Kong person," he said. "If I think something is good for the mainland, I will insist on bringing these ideas to them. Whenever our country is heading towards danger, we in Hong Kong can give warning."



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Earlier, Francis Moriarty, convenor of the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Hong Kong, also called on the Hong Kong Government to maintain press freedom in Hong Kong as an example to the rest of China.

Melinda Liu, President of the Foreign Correspondents' Club of China, said she believed China was a relatively safe country for journalists but she had concerns about foreign journalists' safety when faced with "emotional crowds". Liu advised foreign journalists to apply for visas immediately and for press credentials from the IOC in Beijing before May 20, to be sure of receiving permission to cover the Games. Liu warned foreign journalists that in Beijing their mobile phones could be used by police to trace their locations.

4. IFJ Calls for Hong Kong "Bridge to Dialogue"

Aidan White, General Secretary of the IFJ, says superficial and confrontational media coverage of China in the West plays into the hands of hardliners in Beijing who have cracked down on journalists following coverage of protests in Tibet.

"The China story is complex and needs to be told in context," said Aidan White, IFJ General Secretary at the One Dream seminars in Hong Kong. "Shallow media coverage and commentary that appears with a political bias allows Communist leaders to stir up nationalist feelings against media adding to problems facing journalists on the ground."

Speaking after the IFJ's mission to Beijing in April, White said that the door was open to a new dialogue with Chinese journalists and he called on the HKJA to play a role in helping to build a framework for co-operation following the Olympic Games in August.

"Journalists in Hong Kong have a unique role to play in building a bridge to dialogue that can provide new opportunities for spreading the message that media must be free in China," he said. "After the Olympic Games the fight for press freedom will continue. We will only win that battle by supporting progressive forces that are now emerging within Chinese media and by challenging prejudices on all sides."

White told the meeting that official hardliners used the notion of "social responsibility" as an excuse for controlling media. Some coverage of Tibet and the Olympic torch protests by international media had reinforced hostility to free journalism. He said that foreign correspondents working in China had faced a backlash inside the country after recent events.

"Responsibility has its place in journalism, but not at the expense of truth and independence," he said. "Responsible journalism is the natural ally of media freedom and democracy. It is found whenever journalists are able to work in an ethical environment. It is lost when there is censorship and control of media by politicians driven by authoritarian ideology."

5. Journalists barred as Tibetans jailed

On April 30, 30 Tibetans received sentences at the Intermediate People's Court of Lhasa ranging from three years to life in jail for involvement in protests in Tibet on March 14. No independent journalists were allowed to enter the court. The Tibetans were alleged to have burned 11 shops and attacked police officers, according to China's official Xinhua news agency. Two were sentenced to life. Before the hearing, a group of lawyers offered to give free legal advice to the



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accused, but some received warnings from a Justice Ministry official that they would not receive permits to enter Tibet. The IFJ was told the accused received no legal advice.

6. Foreign journalists receive threats in China

After a CNN commentator caused outrage in China by calling the Beijing leadership “goons and thugs”, thousands of protesters in Xian, Harbin and Jinan defied a police crackdown to chant slogans and hold banners saying "Oppose Tibet independence", "Oppose CNN's anti-China statements", and "Boycott Carrefour" after French President Nicolas Sarkozy refused to rule out boycotting the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games. During the protests, more than 10 foreign journalists received threatening messages by phone or text message, according to Melinda Liu, President of the Foreign Correspondents Club of China (FCCC). Liu said the environment in Beijing for foreign reporters had deteriorated since March 14. The FCCC received at least 50 reports from foreign journalists about threatening incidents in the two weeks after unrest erupted in Tibet.

7. IFJ and HKJA petition for Hu Jia's release

The IFJ and HKJA co-organised a special seminar and petition in April to call for China's Central Government to release journalist and human rights activist Hu Jia. On April 13, the group including legal experts, political scientists and journalists met to discuss Hu's case and agreed that his conviction for “inciting subversion of state power” was unreasonable. The definition of the charge was vague and could be used to prevent all citizens from discussing social issues. The petition demands Hu's immediate release. The collected signatures will be submitted to China's authorities on May 12, which marks the birth of Buddha. Hu was convicted by a Beijing court on April 3 and sentenced to three-and-a-half years' jail.

To sign the petition, visit <http://www.hkja.org.hk/portal/Site.aspx?id=A1-696&lang=en-US>

If you have information on a press freedom violation or matters relating to media freedom and journalists' rights in China, contact staff at IFJ Asia-Pacific so that action can be taken. To contribute to this bulletin, email ifjchina@ifj-asia.org.

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