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People's Republic of China

The Olympics countdown - one year left to fulfil human rights promises

August 2007**Summary****AI Index: ASA 17/024/2007**

With just one year to go before the Olympics take place in Beijing, many in China and abroad are beginning to look ahead to assess the likely legacy of the Games for human rights in China. In this update, Amnesty International summarizes recent developments on four key human rights issues the organization is monitoring ahead of August 2008 and assesses how far these meet promises made by Chinese officials to improve human rights in the run-up to the Olympics.

While positive steps have been made in some limited areas, namely reform of the death penalty system and greater reporting freedom for foreign journalists in China, Amnesty International remains concerned that these are overshadowed by other negative developments – in particular the growing crackdown on Chinese human rights activists and journalists as well as the continued use of ‘Re-education through Labour’ (RTL) and other forms of detention without trial. Official statements suggest that the Olympics are being used to justify such repression in the name of ‘harmony’ or ‘social stability’ rather than acting as a catalyst for reform. Global experience shows that the best way to ensure social stability is to ensure the protection of fundamental human rights based on the rule of law.

Many in China and around the world have high expectations for human rights progress in relation to the Olympic Games. However, the image of the Olympics continues to be being tarnished by ongoing reports of the ‘house arrest’, torture or unfair trial of Chinese activists and the extension of systems for detention without trial in Beijing as part of the city’s ‘clean-up’ ahead of August 2008. If the authorities fail to take significant action to reform such practices, reports of abuses are likely to increase as the Olympics approach with adverse publicity potentially affecting not only China, but other stakeholders in the Olympic movement, including the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the corporate sponsors of the Games.

- **Death Penalty:** Amnesty International welcomes official statements that the numbers of those sentenced to death and executed have decreased following the restoration of Supreme People’s Court review of all death sentences on 1 January

2007. However, the organization maintains that the best way to enable full and informed analysis of death penalty developments in China would be to make the full data public. Greater transparency and public accountability is also essential over procedure in individual death penalty cases. In addition, Amnesty International remains deeply concerned that the death penalty continues to be imposed for non-violent crimes, including economic and drug-related offences.

- **Detention without trial:** Reports indicate that categories of petty crime punishable by ‘Re-education through Labour’ have been expanded as the police increase the use of detention without trial to ‘clean-up’ Beijing ahead of the Games.
- **Human rights activists:** ‘House arrest’ and police surveillance of activists continues, especially in Beijing, while others remain imprisoned as prisoners of conscience. Activists in other parts of China appear to be facing heightened risk of abuse, including arbitrary detention and torture or ill-treatment, as attention is focused on Beijing in the run-up to the Olympics.
- **Media freedom:** While regulations have been introduced aimed at increasing freedom for foreign journalists in China in the run-up to the Olympics, the crackdown continues on domestic journalism and Internet censorship remains pervasive. Some restrictions placed on the families of victims of the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown appear to have been relaxed, but wider public debate of the issue remains banned.

The report concludes with recommendations to the Chinese authorities and the International Olympic Committee (IOC), noting that these issues are directly relevant to Beijing’s hosting of the Olympics and core principles in the Olympic Charter relating to ‘the preservation of human dignity’ and ‘respect for universal fundamental ethical principles.’ Amnesty International remains hopeful that prompt action can still be taken to create a more favourable human rights environment for the Beijing Olympics in August 2008 and beyond.

This briefing updates three previous “Olympics Countdown” reports published by Amnesty International: “*People’s Republic of China: The Olympics countdown – three years of human rights reform?*”, August 2005 (AI Index: ASA 17/021/2005), “*People’s Republic of China: The Olympics countdown – failing to keep human rights promises*”, September 2006 (AI Index: ASA 17/046/2006) and “*People’s Republic of China: The Olympics countdown – repression of activists overshadows death penalty and media reforms*,” April 2007 (AI Index: ASA 17/015/2007).

KEYWORDS:

This report summarizes a 17-page document (7,077 words): *People’s Republic of China: The Olympics countdown – one year left to fulfil human rights promises*, (AI Index: ASA 17/024/2007) issued by Amnesty International in August 2007. Anyone wishing further details or to take action on this issue should consult the full document. An extensive range of our materials on this and other subjects is available at <http://www.amnesty.org> and Amnesty

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