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China

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Head of State	Hu Jintao
Head of government	Wen Jiabao
Death penalty	retentionist
Population	1,331.4 million
Life expectancy	72.5 years

Growing numbers of human rights activists were imprisoned, put under house arrest or surveillance, or harassed. Repression of minority groups, including Tibetans, Uighurs and Mongolians, continued. Falun Gong practitioners were at particularly high risk of torture and other ill-treatment in detention. Christians were persecuted for practising their religion outside state-sanctioned channels. Despite the reinstatement of Supreme People's Court review of death penalty cases, the death penalty remained shrouded in secrecy and continued to be used extensively. Torture of detainees and prisoners remained prevalent. Millions of people had no access to justice and were forced to seek redress through an ineffective extra-legal petition system. Women and girls continued to suffer violence and discrimination. Preparations for the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing were marked by repression of human rights activists. Censorship of the internet and other media intensified.

Death penalty

Death penalty statistics continued to be regarded as a state secret, making it difficult to assess official claims that the reinstatement of Supreme Court review had reduced the number of executions. Based on public reports, Amnesty International estimated that at least 470 people were executed and 1,860 people sentenced to death during 2007, although the true figures were believed to be much higher.

In June, the Supreme People's Court stipulated that first-instance death penalty cases must be held in open court and that courts must move towards public trials for appeals in capital cases. However, death penalty trials continued to be held behind closed doors, police often resorted to torture to obtain "confessions", and detainees were denied prompt and regular access to lawyers. Death sentences and executions continued to be imposed for 68 offences, including many non-violent crimes such as corruption and drug-related offences.

Justice system

People who peacefully exercised their rights such as freedom of expression and association remained at high risk of enforced disappearance, illegal and incommunicado detention or house arrest, surveillance, beatings and harassment.

An estimated 500,000 people were subjected to punitive detention without charge or trial through “re-education through labour” and other forms of administrative detention. Progress on legislation to reform “re-education through labour” remained stalled in the National People’s Congress. Police extended the use of “re-education through labour” and another form of administrative detention, “enforced drug rehabilitation”, to “clean up” Beijing in the run-up to the Olympics.

For an estimated 11-13 million people, the only practical channel for justice remained outside the courts in a system of petitioning to local and higher level authorities, where the vast majority of cases remained unresolved.

Torture and other ill-treatment

Torture in detention remained widespread.

- Yang Chunlin, a human rights activist from Heilongjiang, was detained on 6 July for “subversion of state power”. He had supported the legal action brought by over 40,000 farmers whose land had been confiscated without compensation. Yang Chunlin had helped to gather signatures for a petition entitled “We want human rights, not the Olympics” signed by many of the farmers. Police repeatedly refused him access to his family and lawyer on the grounds that his case “related to the state”. Yang Chunlin was tortured, including on numerous occasions by having his arms and legs stretched and chained to the four corners of an iron bed, and being forced to eat, drink and defecate in that position.
- Shanghai housing rights activist Chen Xiaoming died of a massive haemorrhage shortly after being released from prison on medical parole on 1 July.

Human rights defenders

While space for civil society activities continued to grow, the targeting of human rights defenders who raised issues deemed to be politically sensitive intensified. The authorities criminalized the activities of human rights activists by charging them with offences such as damaging public property, extortion and fraud.

Human rights defenders and their relatives, including children, were increasingly subject to harassment, including surveillance, house arrest and beatings by both government officials and unidentified assailants. Lawyers were particularly targeted, and an increasing number had their licence renewal application rejected.

- Defence lawyer and human rights activist Gao Zhisheng remained under tight police surveillance throughout the year after his conviction in December 2006 for “inciting subversion”. Between 24 June and 4 July and again between 22 September and early November, he was held incommunicado and tortured in unknown locations, before being returned to house arrest in Beijing.
- Human rights lawyer Li Heping was abducted by unidentified individuals in late September, beaten for several hours and told to stop his human rights work. He was then released.
- Several activists died either in detention or shortly after their release.

Freedom of expression

The Chinese authorities maintained efforts to tightly control the flow of information. They decided what topics and news stories could be published, and media outlets were sometimes required to respond within minutes to government directives. The authorities continued to block websites and to filter internet content based on specified words and topics.

Around 30 journalists were known to be in prison and at least 50 individuals were in prison for posting their views on the internet. People were often punished simply for accessing banned websites.

Despite a temporary loosening of regulations applying to foreign journalists in China in the run-up to the Olympics, control over both foreign and Chinese journalists remained tight, and many Chinese journalists were imprisoned for reporting on sensitive subjects. In April, the Ministry of Public Security reportedly ordered the screening of all those attending the Beijing Olympics, with 43 categories of people to be barred, including some based on political or religious beliefs.

Violence and discrimination against women

Women suffered discrimination in employment, education and access to health care. The trafficking of women and girls remained widespread, particularly from North Korea (see below). Domestic violence continued to be prevalent and was said to be a primary cause of suicide among women in rural areas.

It was reported in May that dozens of women in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in south-west China were subjected to forced abortions under the supervision of local family planning officials, in some cases in the ninth month of pregnancy.

Repression of spiritual and religious groups

Millions of people were impeded from freely practising their religion. Thousands remained in detention or serving prison sentences, at high risk of torture, for practising their religion outside of state-sanctioned channels. Falun Gong practitioners, Uighur Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists and underground Christian groups were among those most harshly persecuted.

During the year over 100 Falun Gong practitioners were reported to have died in detention or shortly after release as a result of torture, denial of food or medical treatment, and other forms of ill-treatment.

Underground Protestant house church meetings were frequently disrupted by the police, participants often detained and beaten, and the churches sometimes destroyed.

- Hua Huaiqi, a Beijing-based house church leader, was sentenced in a closed trial in June to six months in prison for obstructing justice. He was reportedly beaten in jail. His 76-year-old mother, who protested against her son's treatment, was herself sentenced to two years in prison for destruction of public and private property after her cane struck the headlight of an oncoming police car.

- Members of China's unofficial Catholic church were repressed. An elderly Catholic bishop, Han Dingxiang, died in custody under suspicious circumstances after more than 20 years in jail. He was quickly cremated by local authorities.
- Religious adherents of all beliefs had difficulty getting legal counsel, as lawyers willing to take up such sensitive cases were often harassed, detained and imprisoned.

Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region

The authorities continued to use the US-led "war on terror" to justify harsh repression of ethnic Uighurs, living primarily in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR), resulting in serious human rights violations. Non-violent expressions of Uighur cultural identity were criminalized. Uighur individuals were the only known group in China to be sentenced to death and executed for political crimes, such as "separatist activities".

China increasingly successfully used the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to pressurize neighbouring countries, including Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, to co-operate in forced returns of Uighurs to China.

There was an increase in the number of Uighurs detained abroad who were forcibly sent to China, where they faced the death penalty and possible execution, including Uighurs with foreign nationality.

- Ismail Samed, who was forcibly returned to China from Pakistan in 2003, was executed on charges of "attempting to split the Motherland" and possession of firearms and explosives.
- Ablikim Abdiriyim, son of Uighur activist Rebiya Kadeer, was tried in secret and sentenced to nine years in prison on charges of "instigating and engaging in secessionist activities". According to official sources, these activities consisted largely of asking Yahoo's "Uighur-language webmaster" to post articles on its website. However, both Yahoo! and Alibaba, the Chinese internet company that operates Yahoo! China's services, have stated they do not provide a Uighur-language web service. Ablikim Abdiriyim was reported to have been tortured and otherwise ill-treated in prison, and was said to have had difficulty recognizing family members during a visit in December. The authorities continued to deny him access to medical treatment.
- The authorities pursued a policy of large-scale Han Chinese migration to XUAR to address alleged labour shortages, while large numbers of young Uighur women and girls – reportedly more than 200,000 – were sent to work in factories in eastern China, often coerced by local authorities and under harsh conditions with low pay.

Tibet Autonomous Region and other ethnic Tibetan areas

Freedom of religion, expression and association of Tibetans continued to be severely restricted. The State Administration for Religious Affairs established government control over the identification and training of Tibetan Buddhist teachers throughout China. Peaceful expressions of support for the Dalai Lama continued to be harshly punished. Efforts to pass information abroad about crackdowns against Tibetans were harshly punished.

- Some 40 Tibetan children were detained by police in Gansu Province for writing pro-Tibetan independence slogans on walls. Eyewitnesses said that four of the boys were bruised and dazed, and that one of them was repeatedly taken away at night, returning in the morning appearing battered and unable to speak.
- Runggye Adak, a Tibetan nomad who during a cultural festival publicly called for the Dalai Lama's return to Tibet, was sentenced to eight years in prison for "inciting to split the country" and "severely disrupting public order". Three others were jailed for 10, nine and three years on charges of "colluding with foreign separatist forces to split the country and distributing political pamphlets" for their efforts to send information to overseas organizations about Runggye Adak's arrest.

North Korean refugees

Approximately 50,000 North Koreans were reportedly hiding in China, living under constant fear of deportation. Each month hundreds of North Koreans were believed to have been forcibly repatriated to North Korea without being given access to UNHCR offices in China. A majority of the North Koreans in China were women, many of whom had been trafficked into China and whose primary means of avoiding forcible return to North Korea was being sold into marriage to Chinese men. Children born to North Korean refugee women in China are effectively stateless and face difficulties gaining access to education and health care.

- Kim Yong-ja, an undocumented North Korean woman, reportedly committed suicide in detention because she feared forcible return to North Korea. She was among 40 North Korean refugees arrested in December near Qinhuangdao, Hubei Province.

Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

Tens of thousands of people demonstrated for political and human rights reforms on the 10th anniversary of Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty in July. Hundreds of overseas Falun Gong practitioners were denied entry to Hong Kong in the run-up to the anniversary. In December, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress ruled it would consider permitting direct elections for the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in 2017, not 2012.

Violence against women

Cases of domestic violence increased 120 per cent in the first three months of the year – a rise attributed to a greater willingness to report such abuses to the police. Activists urged further amendments to the Domestic Violence Ordinance aimed at criminalizing perpetrators of domestic violence and bringing same-sex couples within its scope.

Discrimination against lesbians and gay men

Lesbian and gay activists criticized a January ruling by the Broadcasting Authority that a television programme portraying same-sex relationships was biased and unsuitable for family viewing. In July, the Court of Final Appeal ruled as discriminatory a law which criminalized same-sex sexual relations in public, but did not criminalize heterosexuals for similar conduct.

Asylum-seekers

Asylum-seekers charged with immigration offences continued to be detained pending the outcome of their asylum case. In May, a local NGO reported that many asylum-seekers held in immigration detention facilities had been stripped in front of other inmates, humiliated by immigration officers and denied adequate medical care.

Twenty-nine asylum-seekers held at Castle Peak immigration detention centre went on a three-day hunger strike in October to protest against their prolonged detention. Support groups said some had been detained for nearly a year, while the authorities claimed most had been there for about a month.

Amnesty International reports

- Open Letter to Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress on the reform of Re-education through Labour (ASA 17/020/2007)
- People's Republic of China: The Olympics countdown – one year left to fulfil human rights promises (ASA 17/024/2007)
- China: The Olympics countdown – Repression of activists overshadows death penalty and media reforms (ASA 17/015/2007)
- Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty: ten years on (ASA 19/001/2007)
- China: Internal Migrants: Discrimination and abuse – the human cost of an economic "miracle" (ASA 17/008/2007)
- China: Remember the Gulja massacre? China's crackdown on peaceful protesters (ASA 17/002/2007)