

**While the Observatory applauds the attribution of the Sakharov Prize to Mr. Hu Jia, the situation of human rights defenders continues to warrant concrete action**

**Paris-Geneva, 23 October 2008.** The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), welcomes today's decision of the European Parliament to attribute the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought to Mr. Hu Jia, thereby acknowledging the daily struggle for freedom of all Chinese human rights defenders. The Observatory sadly takes note of the absence of concrete steps to improve the human rights situation in the country two months after the Olympic Games. The Observatory calls upon the People's Republic of China to release immediately all human rights defenders currently detained as a mere sanction to their human rights activities.

As promised before the European Parliament during his speech when France assumed the European Union (EU) Presidency, on 7 August 2008, the French Presidency of the European Union transmitted to Beijing a list of imprisoned human rights defenders and political activists. Mr. Hu Jia's name was included on this list.

President Sarkozy delivered the list as he simultaneously attended the opening ceremony in Beijing, despite calls for the political boycott of the ceremony. This transmission has appeared to a number of observers as a gesture to appease those outraged with the impunity and frequency of human rights violations in China on the eve of the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games.

Since the transmission of this list, no prisoner has been released. Mr. **Zhang Shanguang** had been released prior to the transmission of the list, on 19 July 2008, and just a few days before the term of his prison sentence. All the other prisoners on the list remain incarcerated, and the situation of many has even worsened

The Observatory denounces the particularly harsh conditions of imprisonment for human rights defenders. Mr. **Gao Zhisheng** and Mr. **Hu Jia**, both candidates for the 2008 Nobel Peace Prize, have been victims of bad treatment while in prison. Mr. Gao Zhisheng, a human rights lawyer, was "believed to be in secret detention since September 2007." However, on 8 October 2008, Chinese Human Rights Defenders (CRHD) reported that Mr. Zhisheng has been held in one of Beijing's infamous illegal detention places, along with his wife and children. He has reportedly been beaten, stripped, and forced to eat food from the floor. Mr. Hu Jia remains in very poor condition at Chaobai Prison and has been abused during his detention. On 13 August, he was hand and leg cuffed into solitary confinement for 24 hours.

"The dire situation of human rights defenders and political prisoners in China warrants concrete action and determined follow-up", said Ms. Souhayr Belhassen, FIDH President. Their arbitrary detention illustrates the serious situation in China in the aftermath of the Olympic Games and the complete mistake of those who expected from that major international event progress in the field of human rights and the rule of law in the country.

“When elected as a member of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations, China solemnly pledged to respect human rights. The first step would then consist in putting an end to the repression of the women and men who in China precisely call for this respect”, said Mr. Eric Sottas, OMCT Secretary General.

For further information, please contact:

FIDH : Gaël Grilhot / Karine Appy, + 33 1 43 55 25 18

OMCT : Delphine Reculeau, + 41 22 809 49 39

L'OMCT a son siège à Genève, en Suisse. Elle coordonne le réseau SOS-Torture composé de 282 organisations régionales et internationales dans 93 pays sur cinq continents.

Contact : [omct@omct.org](mailto:omct@omct.org)