

URGENT ACTION

UIGHUR SCHOLAR AT RISK OF DEATH SENTENCE

Prominent Uighur scholar, Ilham Tohti, has been formally arrested and charged with “separatism” in China. The charge is punishable by 10 years to life in prison, or even the death penalty. He is still denied access to his lawyer and his family, and is at risk of torture or other ill-treatment.

Ilham Tohti, 45, an economics professor, founder of Uighur Online website and an outspoken critic of Beijing’s policies on Uighurs, is currently held in a detention centre in Urumqi, provincial capital of Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR). He was taken away from his home in Beijing by public security officers on 25 January 2014. His lawyer Li Fangping has not been allowed to visit him. His wife received the arrest warrant on 25 February informing her that he was being charged with “separatism”. This charge has often been used against Uighurs who speak out against human rights violations.

The detention of Ilham Tohti came shortly after the Communist Party of China launched a new “grand strategic plan” for the XUAR on 19 December 2013. This new plan pledged to make “maintaining social stability” the primary strategic goal within the XUAR.

Eight of Ilham Tohti’s students were also detained at the same time but only four have been released. Other supporters of Ilham Tohti, including prominent Beijing activist Hu Jia, have also been targeted by the authorities since his detention. Hu Jia was detained and interrogated by the police for eight hours on 25 February, before being released.

Please write immediately in English, Chinese or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Ilham Tohti as he is a prisoner of conscience, detained and arrested solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression;
- Urging them to ensure that while Ilham Tohti remains in custody he is not subjected to torture or other ill-treatment, that he has access to legal representation of his choice, his family and any medical care he may require.
- Calling on them to ensure that Ilham Tohti’s supporters are not detained or otherwise harassed as a result of their association with him.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 9 APRIL 2014 TO:

President

Xi Jinping Guojia Zhuxi
The State Council General Office
2 Fuyoujie
Xichengqu, Beijingshi 100017,
People’s Republic of China
Fax: +86 10 6238 1025
Email: gov@govonline.cn
Salutation: Your Excellency

Premier

Li Keqiang Guojia Zongli
The State Council General Office
2 Fuyoujie
Xichengqu, Beijingshi 100017,
People’s Republic of China
Fax: +86 10 6238 1025
Email: gov@govonline.cn
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Director of Department of Justice
Abuliz Usour Tingzhang
Xinjiang Weiwuer Zizhiqu Sifating
27 Renminlu
Urumqi 830
Xinjiang Weiwuer Zizhiqu
People’s Republic of China
Fax: +86 99 1231 1590
Salutation: Dear Director

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 18/14. Further information:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA17/003/2014/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Ilham Tohti has been commenting on the situation of Uighurs in China for many years. His "Uighur Online" website reported human rights violations suffered not only by Uighurs but also by ethnic Han Chinese. The website was shut down by the authorities and has also previously been shut down at least twice: first before the Beijing Olympics in 2008 and again for more than a month in March and April 2009. The authorities put Ilham Tohti under surveillance and interrogated him after he travelled to France in 2009. During the trip, he gave media interviews and criticized China's policies on ethnic minorities.

On 5 July 2009 Uighurs in Urumqi, capital of XUAR, gathered to protest perceived government inaction over killings of migrant Uighur workers in Shaoguan, Guangdong Province on 26 June. While the demonstration started peacefully, rioting erupted following police use of violence against protesters. According to official figures, 197 died in the course of the violence, mostly Han Chinese. The state media news agency, Xinhua, stated that the Chinese authorities detained 1,400 participants in the protest, including several key figures accused of instigating the unrest. Ilham Tohti was arbitrarily detained from 8 July to 23 August 2009 shortly after the authorities said that articles posted on his website had fuelled the violence in Urumqi. He has since been detained periodically and been placed under house arrest.

When Ilham Tohti was detained on 15 January 2014, eight of his students from Central University for Nationalities were also detained. To date, only four have been released. Torture or other ill-treatment are endemic in all forms of detention, despite China having ratified the UN Convention Against Torture in 1988.

Uighurs are a mainly Muslim ethnic minority who are concentrated in the XUAR in China. Since the 1980s, the Uighurs have been the target of systematic and extensive human rights violations. This includes arbitrary detention and imprisonment, incommunicado detention, and serious restriction of religious freedom as well as cultural and social rights. Local authorities might tighten control over religious practice, including prohibiting all government employees and children under the age of 18, from worshipping at mosques. Chinese government policies that limit the use of the Uighur language, severe restrictions on freedom of religion and a sustained influx of Han migrants into the region are destroying their customs and, together with employment discrimination, fuelling discontent and ethnic tensions. The situation has worsened following the attacks in the USA on 11 September 2001 as the Chinese authorities have used the context counter-terrorism, to attempt to justify further repression to the human rights of Uighurs.

Name: Ilham Tohti

Gender m/f: M

Further information on UA: 18/14 Index: ASA 17/009/2014 Issue Date: 26 February 2014