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Asia - China

China - Outrageously harsh sentence

Blogger sentenced to life in prison

23 September 2014

Reporters Without Borders is shocked by a life sentence imposed 23 September on blogger and freedom of information advocate Ilham Tohti

A professor of economics at the Central University for Nationalities in Beijing, **Tohti** was convicted of "separatism" by a court in the Xinjiang capital of Urumqi. Tohti is a Muslim moderate and director of the Uighurbiz.net website.

Uighurbiz, created in 2006, is known for its calls for dialogue between Uyghurs and the majority Han population. The site has been shut down repeatedly.

"Reporters Without Borders condemns this latest attack on freedom of information – the imprisoning of a man for his writings," said Benjamin Ismaïl, head of the organization's Asia-Pacific desk. *"The Ilham Tohti case is representative of the massive arrests and 'stadium trials' on charges of 'separatism' and 'terrorism' that feed tensions between Uyghurs and Hans. The Chinese government must stop violence and intimidation campaigns against Uyghur journalists and netizens."*

Tohti was previously arrested in 2009 and held in a secret location for having relayed information about [rioting in Xinjiang](#). On that occasion, no charges were brought against him, and the government said he was on vacation.

In January of this year, Tohti was arrested again. The move was probably prompted by his commentary on [the Tiananmen "incident"](#) of October 2013. Tohti, despite his moderate stance, was formally [charged with "separatism"](#) on 30 July.

Tohti has vowed to appeal his severe sentence. But the closing of his trial to foreign diplomats and international media, and heavy surveillance surrounding the proceedings, point to an unfair judicial process and to decisions made under heavy influence of the Chinese government.

China is ranked 175 of 180 countries in the 2014 Reporters Without Borders [World Press Freedom Index](#).

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