

Hearing on human rights in China in the run-up to the Olympics

**Summary
26 November 2007**

**Room PHS 01 A 002, 15.45 - 17.15
European Parliament, Brussels**

Ms H el ene Flautre, Chair of the Subcommittee on Human Rights regretted the absence of a representative from the Chinese government despite previous signs of willingness to participate.

Conference call with Mr Hu Jia, nominee in 2007 for the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for the Freedom of Thought

Cyber-dissident Hu Jia, whom, together with his wife Zeng Jinyan, was one of the nominees for the EP's Sakharov Prize this year, spoke from house arrest in Beijing.

The national security department are creating "a human rights disaster". A million people had been persecuted for fighting for human rights, many being detained in camps or mental hospitals.

The "irony" is that the highest responsible official for the organization of the Olympics in China is also the head of the public security bureau in Beijing, which he compared to "the mafia being in charge of the games".

There is a conflict between the hopes of the West and of the Chinese people that holding the games in China "would foster democracy and openness". The Chinese authorities hope that the games would legitimise their rule, like the Olympics in Germany during Nazism.

He urged Europe to "stand firm" and in particular not to sell arms to China because this is a strong message for China. In the recent months in China, there has been a peak of persecutions against human rights defenders. The promises of China are empty.

In his reply to Edward McMillan-Scott (EPP-ED, UK), Hu Jia described the even more difficult situation of other human rights defenders under house arrest or detained and said that Chinese police do everything possible to stop them from having contacts and communication.

Answering the question of Ana Gomes (PES, PT), Hu Jia said it is still very difficult to estimate how many people are still detained in prisons or hospitals because of the events of Tiananmen.

Mr P al Schmitt, Member of the International Olympic Committee, Olympic fencing double champion, MEP, Vice President of the Committee on Culture and Education.

Mr P al Schmitt spoke in his capacity as a member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and on behalf of Mr Jacques Rogge, President of the IOC.

IOC does not take the lead in human rights and political matters. The IOC is not in a position to pressure China on issues outside the Olympic Games. Nevertheless this does not mean that the OIC cannot support human rights (as it had done in suspending the participation of South Africa during the apartheid period).

It is still too early to monitor the effect of the change in human rights in China.

Olympics will raise the quality of life, as well as the economic and social conditions of the Chinese population, therefore, in consequence their human rights situation as well.

This view was questioned by Hélène Flautre and openly challenged by Edward McMillan-Scott, who said "Article 1 of the Olympic Charter refers to fundamental ethical principles, so the IOC does have a mandate to look at these matters". Moreover, the IOC had once banned South Africa from the games because of apartheid, thus showing that "it can take political positions". Mr McMillan-Scott argued "it is time for the IOC to make a political statement" on the situation in China.

Mr Schmitt then agreed to this, saying he would speak to the IOC board and to President Jacques Rogge. He admitted that the IOC "cannot close its ears" to these demands any longer and that it should not be afraid to make a political statement.

Mr Phelim Kine, Asia Researcher, Human Rights Watch (HRW), Hong Kong

HRW reported:

1) Violations of the Chinese government's specific Olympic-related commitment to respect freedom of foreign press. Temporary legislation guarantees in paper freedoms for foreign press from 1 January 2007 to 17 October 2008. Nevertheless, this legislation is not respected and there are several weekly reported cases of foreign journalists being harassed and detained. For example, on 22 November 2007 Swiss journalists were physically harassed and detained for having filmed protests of farmers due to the forced expropriation of their land.

2) Violations of legally-guaranteed labour rights of the estimated one million migrant construction workers employed at construction projects in Beijing, which are directly or indirectly related to preparations for the 2008 Olympic Games.

3) Violations of fundamental rights to shelter through demolition of residential areas in Beijing and the forced relocation of their residents while building the 2008 Olympics-related venues and infrastructure.

Even if the IOC is not in the position to pressure China on human rights issues, the IOC is failing to ensure that China lives up to its promises of ensuring media freedom and is "turning a deaf ear to the reports of many NGOs and International Organisations".

Mr Hong Bing Yuan, law professor, human rights defender, jurist and novelist.

Prof. Yuan was unable to attend the meeting in person, but he submitted a speech which was read by Edward McMillan-Scott.

The Chinese Communist Party has carried out relentless political persecutions, and the loss of tens of millions of Chinese people's lives by unnatural causes as a result.

The eight-year-long political persecution against Falun Gong practitioners, starting from the end of last century and to date, constitutes the most miserable human rights disaster in the world today.

The economic development in contemporary China is based on the slave labour of 90 million peasant labourers. China's economic development is at the expense of its enormous inequality.

In 1989, the sky in Beijing was stained red with the blood of students and citizens; yet, next year the Olympic Games will be held in the same city where the massacre took place. The Olympics will certainly attract the world's attention. However, the cheering and flowers above these human rights disasters will only bring shame and disgrace to the Olympic spirit.

Ms Sharon Hom, Executive Director of 'Human Rights in China' (New York)

We all have a stake in next year's Games, and the stakes are high.

In February 2001, Beijing's Deputy Mayor Liu Jingmin, a top Olympic official, stated, "By applying for the Olympics, we want to promote not just the city's development, but the development of society, including democracy and human rights." Who is responsible for delivering on these promises?

The host city contract, which comprises the promises made by the Chinese authorities to the IOC, to its own people and to the international community, is still not public.

China is having a harder and harder time juggling efforts to maintain domestic control while simultaneously presenting an open face to the world.

Yet the IOC, Olympics sponsors and the Chinese authorities respond to human rights issues raised by civil society and the media with "this is not about politics" rhetoric.

Blacklist: Earlier this year, an excerpt of a purported official Olympics blacklist was posted on websites affiliated with the Falun Gong movement. This blacklist contains 42 banned categories of people—including overseas hostile forces, the Dalai Lama and associates, Falun Gong practitioners; media workers, NGOs, "dangerous elements," and members of illegal organizations.

Security arrangements: China's promise of a "High-Tech Olympics" aims to "guarantee security during the Games on the basis of sound social order." The safety of the Games is certainly important. But China has yet to provide assurances that its state-of-the-art security equipment will not be used against activists and members of civil society. Without an independent judiciary there is no effective control of authorities to balance security concerns against rights of individuals.

EP should consider a resolution on China – urging China to deliver on its promises. The struggle for advancing human rights in China is a marathon—one that will last well beyond 2008.

Mr Vincent Metten, EU Policy Director, International Campaign for Tibet

In its daily work, International Campaign for Tibet experience virus attacks from professional hackers.

The main concerns of the ICT are: increasing control to Buddhism, intensification of the demographic colonisation, the socio-economic marginalisation of Tibetans and environmental deterioration of the region.

The goal of International Campaign for Tibet is to reach the autonomy for Tibet. So far dialogues are not achieving the results hoped.

Recommendations/objectives: to support the dialogue between China and Tibet; to invite the Dalai Lama to China before the Olympics and the ratification of ICCPR by China.