



Arrest of Chinese dissident Hu Jia

In a resolution adopted on Thursday afternoon (17 January), MEPs called on the Chinese authorities to release human rights campaigner Hu Jia and to respect human rights in the run-up to this year's Olympic Games.

Hu Jia was taken from his home in Beijing by police on 27 December 2007 on charges of inciting subversion. He and his wife Zeng Jinyan, who were among the candidates for last year's European Parliament Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, have thrown the spotlight on human rights abuses in China over the past few years and spent many periods under house arrest as a result of their campaigning.

Last November Hu Jia spoke via audio-phone from Beijing to a hearing held in Brussels by the EP's Human Rights Subcommittee on *Human rights in China in the run-up to the Olympic Games*. At that time the subcommittee's chair, Hélène Flautre (Greens/EFA, FR), congratulated Hu Jia on his courage in speaking out and said he could always count on the support of the European Parliament.

Human rights organisations described the December arrest as another move by the Chinese authorities to silence critics ahead of the Beijing Olympics, and 57 intellectuals from China immediately published an open letter calling for the instant release of Hu Jia. European Parliament President Hans-Gert Pöttering has already issued a statement criticising the arrest.

MEPs demand immediate release of Hu Jia and other dissidents

In today's resolution, Parliament "strongly condemns the detention of Hu Jia and demands his prompt release and that of all the dissidents who have been arrested and jailed for crimes of opinion". It also urges the authorities "to allow Hu Jia and all the other dissidents under arrest to receive medical assistance if necessary" (Hu Jia suffers from a liver disease).

China urged to live up to its human rights commitments - especially in Olympic year

MEPs call on China "to respect its commitments to human rights and the rule of law, in particular the provisions of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders" and "not to use the Olympic Games as a pretext to arrest and illegally detain and imprison dissidents, journalists and human rights activists".

Indeed, Parliament repeats its view that "human rights concerns should receive far more attention in the build-up to the Beijing Olympic Games", and points to Articles 1 and 2 of the Olympic Charter, which advocate 'respect for universal fundamental ethical principles' and the promotion of a peaceful society concerned 'with the preservation of human dignity'.

Reform of Chinese criminal law needed

In addition, MEPs call on China "to reform its criminal law to allow greater freedom of expression to journalists, writers, free-lances, reporters etc." who will report to the world on the Olympic Games. They also urge the authorities "to close the so-called 'black jails', places of detention set up to detain 'troublemakers' in advance of this year's Olympics".

Lastly, the EU Council is urged to take action in relation to the Chinese authorities regarding not only the arrest of Hu Jia but also the disappearance on 22 September 2007 of Gao Zhisheng, a noted human rights attorney.

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