

HUMAN RIGHTS FOR CHINA: OUR FRIENDS IN HEFEI

BRIEFING FOR BELFAST CITY COUNCIL



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INTRODUCTION

In August 2005 the Lord Mayor of Belfast and the Mayor of Hefei signed a Sister City Agreement, consummating years of work to establish close links between the cities. Belfast City Council worked on the relationship with Hefei from 1997, resulting first in a 'Memorandum of Understanding' between the two cities, which later culminated in 'sisterhood'.¹ The Sister Cities Programme is one which seeks to "stimulate environments through which communities will creatively learn, work and solve problems together through reciprocal cultural, educational, municipal, business, professional and technical exchanges and projects."²

Hefei is the capital of Anhui Province, in central China, and has a growing population of 5 million. The city lies between the Yangtze and Huaihe Rivers, connecting it to large areas of Central China. The Chinese government has worked to develop Hefei as an industrial centre, designating it a Special Economic Zone.

Belfast has committed not only to an economic relationship, but an exchange of knowledge, culture and expertise. It is in a position to provide support and encourage progress in the field of human rights in Hefei which, by example, could become a leader for the rest of China.

In the year when the Olympics comes to China, it is particularly important that overseas friends work with the Chinese authorities to lead by example and encourage systematic and progressive change in China's human rights record. Belfast has committed not only to an economic relationship, but an exchange of knowledge, culture and expertise. Through its Sister City Agreement, Belfast City Council should now take this unique opportunity to support the Hefei authorities in improving human rights in the city and to act as a flagship for change in China.

CHALLENGING THE DEATH PENALTY

China executes more people each year than the rest of the world combined. Sixty-eight crimes carry the death penalty, including non-violent crimes such as tax evasion. In 2007, Amnesty International recorded more than 1,860 death sentences in China, and confirmed 470 executions. Since January 2007, the Supreme People's Court has

¹ Belfast City Council, "Belfast signs historic agreement with Chinese sister city", 13 June 2005. 14 April 2008 <<http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/news/news.asp?id=284&month=june%202005>>.

² Sister Cities International, "Sister Cities International Mission Statement & Goals". 12th May 2008. <<http://www.sister-cities.org/sci/aboutsci/mission>>.

resumed reviewing all death sentences passed in China. While officials claim that this has resulted in a decrease in use of the death penalty, Amnesty International maintains that an informed analysis can only be carried out when data about the death penalty is made public.³

To choose one year as an illustration, in 2000, six people are known to have been executed in Hefei, for crimes including theft and damaging electricity supply.⁴ In 1996 at least 18 people were executed in Hefei.⁵

Amnesty International calls for the abolition of the death penalty in China and, meanwhile, calls for transparency and a reduction in the number of crimes, especially non-violent ones, punishable by death.

ENABLING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Censorship of publications and the internet in China continues with new regulations to strengthen government control. Those who express views contradicting the government's, especially regarding sensitive topics, are increasingly likely to be detained or harassed. 30 journalists and 50 internet users are known to be behind bars.

Wang Daqi, an elderly former professor at Hefei Industrial University, was arrested at his home in January 2002. He was convicted of 'inciting the overthrow of state power' and sentenced to one year in prison. Daqi had published articles in his magazine, *Ecology*, which argued for the progressive democratisation of China. When Daqi's wife, Feng Shua, was first allowed to visit, almost a year after her husband's arrest, she reported that he was living in bad conditions and that she had serious concerns for his health.⁶

Since January 2007, new regulations have officially allowed foreign journalists in China total media freedom, although several foreign journalists report that some regions and topics remain forbidden and some journalists have been detained in order to prevent their accessing them.⁷ Amnesty International welcomes the new regulations and calls for their extension to include national journalists, including those in Hefei. Amnesty International also calls for the release of journalists already imprisoned for publishing views differing from the government's.

OPPOSING DETENTION WITHOUT TRIAL AND TORTURE

³ Amnesty International, *Death Sentences and Executions in 2007* (AI Index: ACT 50/001/2008). 21st April 2008. <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ACT50/001/2008/en/b43a1e5a-ffea-11dc-b092-bdb020617d3d/act500012008eng.html>.

⁴ Amnesty International, *China: Death Penalty Log 2000*. (AI Index: ASA 17/031/2002). 21st April 2008. <<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA17/031/2002/en>>.

⁵ Amnesty International, *China: Death Penalty Log 1996*. 21st April 2008. <<http://www.amnesty.org/ft/library/asset/ASA17/035/1997/en/dom-ASA170351997en.html>>.

⁶ Stacy Mosher & Qing Liu, "Scholar Wang Sentenced to Prison", 16th January 2003. Human Rights in China. 14th April 2008.

<http://iso.hrichina.org/public/contents/press?revision%5fid=11127&item%5fid=11126>. See also 'China 2004 Annual Report.' Reporters Without Borders. 14th April 2008. http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=10166.

⁷ Human Rights Watch, *China: Media Freedom Under Assault Ahead of 2008 Olympics*, 31st May 2007. 21st April 2008. <<http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2007/05/31/china16029.htm>>.

'Re-education Through Labour' is a form of detention imposed without charge or trial for up to four years. It is commonly used against human rights defenders, as is house arrest, intimidation and imprisonment. Torture remains widespread in China, especially in labour camps and prisons.

Professor Wu Xiaohua was arrested in December 1999 for appealing to the Government to end to its persecution of the Falun Gong sect. She was sentenced to 'Re-education Through Labour', and was allegedly tortured at the Anhui Female Detention Centre and Hefei's No. 4 People's Hospital. Subsequently released, in October 2001 Xiaohua was reportedly placed under house arrest. Later, she was sent to a labour camp where she was allegedly tortured by having her mouth stuffed with rags and tissues soaked in urine and menstrual blood. In mid-October 2001, on the tenth day of a hunger strike Xiaohua initiated to protest against her detention, she was again sent to No. 4 People's Hospital in Hefei. There she alleges she was stripped, shocked with electric needles and an electric baton, and forced to take medication. The Chinese authorities deny these allegations of torture.⁸

Amnesty International urges the Chinese government to abolish the administrative detention system and calls for the international community to speak out against torture and the persecution of individuals for their religious or political beliefs.

UPHOLDING LABOUR RIGHTS

Independent trade unions remain illegal in China, and the official All China Federation of Trade Unions frequently fails to protect its members' interests. Low wages, mass lay-offs and poor working conditions are common.

In June 2006 an explosion at Anhui Dun'an Chemical Industry Company, in nearby Ma'anshan, killed 16 workers and injured 24. Workers attributed the incident to overloading of production capacity and the overstocking of dangerous materials. Some claimed that the management disregarded safety concerns, ignoring safety alarms on machines and not allowing time for maintenance, temperature monitoring or checking stock levels of explosives.⁹

As economic ties are an important factor in the sisterhood agreement between Belfast and Hefei, Belfast has a responsibility to ensure workers' safety and rights

RECOMMENDATIONS

Belfast has a lot to gain from a close relationship with Hefei, not least in terms of investment, education and cultural exchange. Belfast has seen great change in recent years and has become a leader in human rights protection, through legislation, institutions and academic excellence. Belfast City Council is in a unique position to support the development of Hefei by sharing knowledge with the city's leaders as they

⁸ Chen Gang et al. v. China, Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, 'Opinion No. 7/2003' in *Civil and Political Rights, Including the Question of Torture and Detention* by the United Nations Economic and Social Council, 26th November 2003, pp. 39-44. 14th April 2008.
[http://www.unhcr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/2848af408d01ec0ac1256609004e770b/2b378f12e7a8e907c1256e580039672a/\\$FILE/G0316900.doc](http://www.unhcr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/2848af408d01ec0ac1256609004e770b/2b378f12e7a8e907c1256e580039672a/$FILE/G0316900.doc).

⁹ China Labour Bulletin, "Overloading and overstocking claimed as cause to blast of chemical plant in Anhui", trans. Business and Human Rights Resource Centre, 26th June 2006. 21st April 2008.
<http://www.business-humanrights.org/Categories/Issues/Abuses/Deaths?&batch_start=521>.

form fair systems, policies and governance arrangements in the rapidly developing city.

Amnesty International calls on Belfast City Council to:

- promote the integration of human rights dialogue and education into plans for the relationship with Hefei;
- put human rights on the agenda of all future meetings with the Hefei civic leadership;
- raise human rights issues with all official visitors from Hefei to Belfast;
- ensure Council representatives raise human rights concerns during all official visits to Hefei.

By raising human rights issues with civic leadership of Hefei, Belfast City Council has an opportunity to promote a positive framework for the city's future and to help ensure that the legacy of the 2008 Olympic Games means improved human rights for the people of Hefei and across the nation.