



**THE 2008
BEIJING OLYMPICS
AN OPPORTUNITY FOR
HUMAN RIGHTS?**



AMNESTY
International

THE 2008 BEIJING OLYMPICS

When China was bidding for and when it was awarded the Olympic Games, the Chinese authorities stated on many occasions that the Beijing Olympics would help human rights in China. Wang Wei, Secretary General of the Beijing Organising Committee: 'We are confident that the Games coming to China not only promotes our economy, but also enhances human rights.' The International Olympic Committee (IOC) often referred to these promises. Jacques Rogge, President of the IOC: 'We are convinced that the Olympic Games will improve the human rights record in China.'

The 2008 Summer Olympics, August 8 to 24, are centred in China's capital Beijing. The hosting of the Olympics provides China with a unique opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to human rights. Amnesty International is calling on the Chinese authorities to introduce concrete reforms in the run-up to the Beijing Olympics. Corporate sponsors are asked to encourage the IOC and National Olympics Committees (NOCs) to raise human rights concerns with the Chinese government.

Many international companies are involved in the Beijing Olympics – through sponsoring, contracting, trade and investment. They are a crucial part of the infrastructure, logistics, broadcasting and merchandising of the Games. Also in the context of the Beijing Olympics, companies need to stay clear of human rights abuses and foster human rights: by bringing development, sharing knowledge and making profits in ways that respect human rights.

Police patrol Tiananmen Square. Banner reads: 'Socialist, harmonious society'. © Dubin



WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Despite the promises, serious violations of human rights continue in China. They include practices linked to China's preparation for the Games. Examples:

- Individuals who sent open letters to the IOC calling for improvements in China's human rights protection have been imprisoned.
- Thousands of Beijing residents have been forcibly evicted from their homes, often illegally, in the city's preparation for the Games.
- Groups that the authorities fear may embarrass the nation during the games have been repressed by arrests, harassment, administrative detention and censorship.
- Chinese production is connected to forced labour practices, both in 'regular' factories and in camps for 're-education through labour'.
- The government continues to suppress the use of internet, for example by blocking websites and persecuting advocates of internet freedom.
- International human rights organisations, including Amnesty International, continue to have extremely limited access to China to carry out research or promote human rights.

The Chinese authorities are preoccupied with ensuring a harmonious society and good social environment for successfully holding the Games. However, to achieve that goal, they use policies to 'strike hard' against those perceived to be jeopardizing such an environment. These 'strike hard' policies are also used to constrain the legitimate activities of journalists, lawyers and human rights defenders.

THE CHINESE AUTHORITIES USE STRIKE HARD POLICIES TO ENSURE A 'HARMONIOUS SOCIETY'.

YE GUOZHU

Housing rights activist Ye Guozhu is serving a four-year prison sentence in connection with his efforts to organize a demonstration against forced evictions in Beijing linked with preparations for the Olympics. He continues to suffer from health problems, partly as a result of torture in detention, including beatings with electro-shock batons. In February 2007, Ye Guozhu was once again assigned to a period of 'discipline' in Qingyuan prison, apparently in connection with his ongoing attempts to appeal against his conviction. This is reportedly due to last for ten months. Amnesty International considers Ye Guozhu a prisoner of conscience and calls for his immediate and unconditional release.

Protest against a water sports venue for the 2008 Olympics, June 2005.
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FORCED EVICTIONS

Concerns remain over inadequate compensation for those evicted from their homes as a result of construction in the run-up to the Olympics.

For example, on 28 March 2007 officials organized a guided media trip for journalists to the recently-completed Shunyi Olympic Rowing-Canoeing Park, approximately 40km northeast of Beijing, which had been the focus of a land seizure dispute since mid-2005. During the media trip, residents of nearby Maxinzhuang village, Beixiaoying county, Shunyi district, told reporters that they had still not been compensated for the loss of their farmland. One villager added that two people remained in prison for their part in the protests of 2005. However, the general manager of the Park reportedly claimed that the dispute had been settled as early as July 2005.

Companies are expected to:

- ensure that when operating in situations of state-imposed house evictions, residents are duly compensated.
- help protect the safety of those who protest evictions from their homes carried out without full procedural protection and due process.

Chinese officials confiscate computers from an illegal internet cafe in Shunde, 2004.
© REUTERS/China Photos



THOUSANDS OF BEIJING RESIDENTS HAVE BEEN FORCIBLY EVICTED FROM THEIR HOMES, OFTEN ILLEGALLY, IN THE CITY'S PREPARATION FOR THE GAMES.

FORCED LABOUR AND 'RE-EDUCATION THROUGH LABOUR'

'Re-education through labour' (RTL) and other forms of administrative detention (without a sentence passed by a court of law) continue to be used extensively in China, despite repeated calls from both inside and outside China for the system to be abolished. Amnesty International is concerned that the forthcoming Olympic Games may be acting as an incentive for the authorities to retain the system in the name of maintaining public order in Beijing.

On 8 May 2006, the Beijing city authorities decided that RTL would be used as a way to control various types of 'offending behaviour' to clean up the city's image in the run-up to the Olympics. This would include serious cases of 'unlawful advertising or leafleting, unlicensed taxis, unlicensed businesses, vagrancy and begging'. What is considered to be 'serious' appears to be defined as those who have engaged in such acts more than twice. Chinese commentators have argued that this is the first time since mid-2003 that officials have specifically invoked the use of 'controversial measures' like RTL at the local level in order to address public order issues in the cities.

Many institutions of the 're-education (or reform) through labour' system include factories that use forced prison labour, but which publicly advertise themselves as ordinary companies. Some of these have also produced for exports or have been suppliers to foreign companies.

Companies are expected to:

- monitor closely whether forced labour institutions are part of their supply chain;
- demand access of independent monitors to all suppliers under suspicion, in order to guarantee they do not obtain products from such institutions;
- guarantee that in their own enterprises and with suppliers no measures are practiced that constitute or amount to forced labour, such as the confiscation of identity papers, forced unpaid overtime, obligatory deposits or the withholding of wages.



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SHI TAO

Journalist Shi Tao serves a 10-year sentence for sending an email summarizing a Chinese Central Propaganda Department communiqué on how journalists should handle the 15th anniversary of the crackdown on the 1989 pro-democracy movement. He is not allowed to receive printed matter, including books or newspapers. In November 2006, the World Association of Newspapers awarded its annual Golden Pen of Freedom prize to Shi Tao. In March 2007, Hong Kong's privacy commission cleared Yahoo! Hong Kong Ltd of any liability for sharing Shi Tao's account user information with the Chinese authorities, apparently because there was 'insufficient evidence' to hold the company liable under Hong Kong privacy laws. Amnesty International remains deeply concerned about the role of Yahoo! in providing information to the authorities that helped to secure Shi Tao's conviction, and more generally about the involvement of global Internet companies in the practice of government censorship in China.

RESTRICTED ACCESS TO INFORMATION

On 1 January 2007, new regulations for foreign journalists took effect aimed at increasing their freedom to cover news stories in China in the run-up to and during the Olympics. Amnesty International welcomes these regulations to the extent that they facilitate foreign media reporting in China. However, uncertainty remains as to whether they also apply to the autonomous regions of Tibet and Xinjiang. Furthermore, these regulations do nothing to increase media freedom for domestic journalists, who typically face more serious human rights violations than foreign media. While officials have suggested that they may be extended, Article 9 of the current regulations makes clear that they expire on 17 October 2008.

China has the most extensive internet censorship in the world. There are many restrictions on the reception of foreign media and e-mail. Authorities routinely monitor telephone conversations, facsimile transmissions, electronic mail and internet communications of foreign visitors, businessmen, diplomats and journalists, as well as dissidents, activists and others. Dozens of people have been arrested for disclosing 'state secrets' on the internet.

Companies are expected to:

- be transparent about the filtering process used by the company in China and around the world;
- exhaust all judicial remedies and appeals in China and internationally before complying with state directives where these have human rights implications;
- make known to the government the company's principled opposition to implementing any requests or directives which breach international human rights norms;
- publicly commit to honouring the freedom of expression provision in the Chinese constitution.

FURTHER READING

www.amnesty.nl/china gives information on Amnesty's campaign on the 2008 summer olympics (mostly in Dutch)

China: Olympic Countdown reports – These semi-annual Amnesty International reports provide an update on the human rights situation in China.

http://asiapacific.amnesty.org/apro/aproweb.nsf/pages/countries_reports_china_ASA170192007

When in China – This publication of the Dutch section of Amnesty International provides an overview of human rights concerns that confront companies.

<http://www.amnesty.nl/documenten/wheninchina.pdf>

Human Rights and Business Pages on Forced labour, freedom of association and discrimination.

<http://www.amnesty.nl/documenten/forcedlabour.pdf>

<http://www.amnesty.nl/documenten/freedomofassociation.pdf>

<http://www.amnesty.nl/documenten/nondiscrimination.pdf>

SUPPORT OUR FIGHT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

AI's vision is of a world in which every person enjoys all of the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

In pursuit of this vision, AI's mission is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination, within the context of its work to promote all human rights.

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