

ARREST OF DISSIDENT LATEST SIGN THAT CHINA WON'T BUDGE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Zhou Yuanzhi Arrested For "Inciting Subversion of State Power"

Washington, DC, May 08 – Since the beginning of this year, China has demonstrated again and again that it will not fulfill the promises it made during its bid to host the 2008 Olympic Games to improve human rights, particularly by permitting greater freedom of expression. Hu Jia, a prominent AIDS and environmental activist, was arrested late last year and subsequently sentenced to three and a half years in prison for "inciting subversion of state power". In March, following protests in Tibet and neighboring provinces, hundreds of Tibetans were killed and thousands arrested in the ensuing police crackdown. Now, details are emerging of the arrest of yet another prominent government critic ahead of this summer's Olympic Games.

On May 3rd, 2008 Zhou Yuanzhi, 47, was arrested by the National Security Bureau in Zhongxiang City of China's Hubei Province on the suspicion of 'inciting subversion of state power'. He remains in custody. His wife was also taken into custody at the same time, but was later released. She now remains under house arrest.

Zhou is a freelance writer and a member of the Independent Chinese PEN Centre. In addition to two books that he authored and which were published in Hong Kong, he frequently wrote political commentaries, essays, and short stories under various pen names that have appeared on overseas Chinese magazines and websites. Zhou's writing has often been critical, focusing on social issues and corruption by government officials. Formerly the Deputy Chief of the Zhongxiang City Taxation Bureau, he was dismissed from that office and expelled from the Chinese Communist Party in 1992 as a result of having contributed a piece to the Voice of America radio program.

China has signed onto, but not ratified, the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which protects the freedom of citizens to criticize their government. Political dissidents continue to be detained and convicted in China under vague national security charges such as "inciting subversion of state power" and "stealing state secrets". The arrest of Zhou Yuanzhi is only the latest event in an ongoing campaign by the Chinese government to silence all dissent before the Olympic Games. Such actions only serve to further damage what little credibility the government has in its commitments to improve human rights. The Laogai Research Foundation calls for the immediate and unconditional release of Zhou Yuanzhi.

The Laogai Research Foundation is a not-for-profit organization founded by former political prisoner Harry Wu in 1992. Its mission is to gather information on and raise public awareness of the Laogai – China's extensive system of forced-labor prison camps.

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