



July 6, 2009

Honourable Lawrence Cannon
Minister of Foreign Affairs
125 Sussex Drive
Ottawa, ON K1A 0G2

Dear Minister,

On behalf of the members and board of PEN Canada, the Canadian centre of International PEN, I write to share our concerns regarding the formal arrest of prominent writer and past president of the Independent Chinese PEN Center, Liu Xiaobo.

On December 8, 2008, the Chinese authorities detained Mr. Liu after he co-authored Charter 08, a manifesto which calls for greater freedoms and democracy in China. The original document was signed by 300 prominent intellectuals; since its publication it has been signed by more than 9,000 Chinese citizens.

On June 8, 2009, Mr. Liu had been held for the maximum six months under “residential surveillance,” and therefore, under Chinese law, ought to have been freed on that day. We were deeply troubled to learn instead that on June 24, police notified Mr. Liu’s wife of his formal arrest on suspicion of “inciting to subvert state power.”

Xinhua, China’s official news agency has reported that Mr. Liu was involved in “agitation activities, such as [the] spreading of rumours and defaming the government.” There is no evidence for this claim, except an alleged confession Mr. Liu is said to have made while in police custody.

We believe that Mr. Liu is being targeted for his efforts to advocate peaceful political change in China, specifically his decision to co-author and sign Charter 08. We are concerned that his prosecution on these charges will be used by the government of China to intimidate and silence its critics and, as such, that it violates his right to freedom of expression, as set out in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Mr. Liu has not been allowed to see his wife, Liu Xia, or lawyer, Mo Shaoping, in over two months. We have already written to the Chinese government seeking assurances that he will be granted access to them as a matter of urgency. We urge you to take up this matter up with the Chinese authorities, at the highest levels, and to do whatever you can to ensure that Mr. Liu receives proper legal representation and a fair trial.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

Ellen Seligman
President, PEN Canada

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