



25 YEARS *for* FREEDOM *of* EXPRESSION

Jiang Weiping: Media must monitor government in a civil society

TORONTO, February 9, 2009: Speaking in public for the first time since his arrival in Canada last week, Jiang Weiping, poet, journalist and former bureau chief of the Hong Kong daily *Wen Hui Bao*, said he still believed the media “has the duty to monitor government actions in a civil society. Unfortunately under the current political system of China, this is a high risk job.” Jiang added that his “pursuit for freedom of the press has not been shaken, neither has my goal to construct democracy and rule of law in China been changed.” After thanking organizations and people who had kept international attention focused on his case and helped him travel to Canada after a long prison sentence on charges of subversion, Jiang added, “We all have to continue with our efforts in seeking further progress in China.”

Jiang spoke at a PEN Canada press conference in downtown Toronto. During her introductory remarks, Nelofer Pazira, president of PEN Canada, praised the moral courage he had shown throughout his ordeal. “It is easy to talk about speaking truth to power,” she said, “but most of us fall silent when power replies. The heavy price Mr. Jiang has paid for refusing to toe the line drawn by China’s all-pervading censors is a stark reminder of how dangerous and difficult free speech can become when the state is determined to intimidate you.”

Pazira added that more than 40 writers and journalists are still being detained by the People’s Republic of China, making it the largest jailer of writers worldwide. She said the international community’s message to the PRC was simple, and had been eloquently stated in Charter 08, a manifesto of democratic reforms which more than 7,000 Chinese citizens have recently endorsed: “We should end the practice of viewing words as crimes.”

Jiang Weiping has been an Honorary Member of PEN Canada since 2003. He was awarded the inaugural One Humanity award in 2006. Eight of PEN Canada’s other honorary members are currently serving prison sentences in China.

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Backgrounder—February 9, 2009

Jiang Weiping 姜维平

Jiang Weiping is an investigative journalist who was formerly Dalian bureau chief for the Hong Kong newspaper *Wen Hui Bao*, and a reporter for the state news agency Xinhua. In 1999, writing for *Qianshao (Frontline)*, a monthly magazine based in Hong Kong, Jiang published accounts of a number of major scandals among the Communist party in north-east China. He disclosed that Bo Xilai, then governor of Liaoning province and subsequently Minister of Commerce and a member of the Politburo, had covered up corruption among his friends and family members while serving as mayor of Dalian; he revealed that Ma Xiangdong, Vice Mayor of Shenyang, had gambled away 30 million yuan (US\$3 million) of public money; and he reported that the Mayor of Daqing had used public funds to buy apartments for each of his 29 mistresses.

The *Frontline* articles appeared between June and September 1999 under several pen-names and the outcry they provoked led to Ma's prosecution and subsequent execution for corruption. But in May 2001 Jiang was charged with various forms of subversion. After a secret trial in September 2001, the Dalian Intermediate Court found him guilty of "revealing state secrets", "instigating to overthrow state power" and "illegally holding confidential documents". In January 2002, he was formally sentenced to eight years in prison. At his sentencing, Jiang declared his innocence and said the verdict "trampled on the law."

While in prison, Jiang was kept in solitary confinement for 45 days and denied visitors for two years. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reported that he was refused medical treatment for atropic gastritis and was forbidden to read books or make phone calls. In December 2002 an appeals court reduced his sentence to six years. In 2006, in the face of growing international pressure, he was granted an early release on condition that he refrain from political activity. Since then Jiang has worked as a calligrapher in Dalian. Two weeks ago, his passport was returned to him. Shortly afterwards he left China

to be reunited with his wife and daughter in Toronto, after being granted a special travel permit, on humanitarian grounds, at the Canadian embassy in Beijing.

In 2001, Jiang was awarded an International Press Freedom Award by the CPJ. In 2006, he was given the inaugural PEN Canada One Humanity Award. In addition to his work as journalist, Jiang has published two books of poetry.

PEN Canada, which celebrates its 25th anniversary this year, has taken an active interest in freedom of expression in China since 1989, when poet Duo Duo came to Toronto after the suppression of pro-democracy protests at Tiananmen Square. Since then PEN has offered assistance to and helped raise awareness of many other Chinese writers who have been threatened, harassed, attacked or imprisoned for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression.

The 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing highlighted ongoing human rights and freedom of expression abuses in China despite the government's promise to improve conditions and honour its commitment to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. PEN Canada was part of a ten-month campaign that urged the PRC to guarantee press freedom before, during, and after the Games, and to release all writers and journalists who are being held in its jails. Five months after the end of the Games, more than 40 writers and journalists are still in prison, making China the largest jailer of writers worldwide.

PEN is particularly concerned about the rise of Internet writers being detained and held for subversion or the violation of state secrets laws, including Shi Tao, who is serving a 10-year sentence for publicizing notes from a government briefing meeting. Minority issues are another concern in the autonomous regions of Tibet and Xinjiang where "separatist struggles" place writers at risk of arrest.

In January 2009, members of PEN Canada joined PEN members from around the world in a petition on behalf of Liu Xiaobo, former President of the Independent Chinese PEN Centre. Liu has been detained since December 2008 for signing Charter 08, a landmark document advocating wide-ranging democratic reforms and constitutional guarantees of fundamental human rights.

For more information: www.pencanada.ca