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No Let-Up: China Detains Another Writer Feng Zhenghu Held Incommunicado

New York, Toronto, Stockholm, June 6, 2008—Feng Zhenghu, a Shanghai-based rights defender, online writer and freelance journalist, has been detained in a week that has seen significant backsliding in the climate for freedom of expression in China, according to PEN.

Although the world saw encouraging signs of a more open media climate following the May 12th earthquake in Sichuan Province, Chinese authorities have recently set about reestablishing control over press coverage, and the larger Olympic-year crackdown on individual dissidents and independent voices has continued unabated. Feng's case is the latest in a string of ongoing detentions and harassment of writers inside China.

Feng Zhenghu was detained at 9:30 a.m. on June 5 by police from the Yangpu District Branch of the Public Security Bureau in Shanghai on suspicion of “intentionally disturbing public order,” a charge that could lead to criminal prosecution. Police reportedly raided his home and confiscated written materials and three computers. The charge is believed to stem from a collection of articles he published and distributed alleging wrongful convictions by the Shanghai courts, along with other writings. He is being held incommunicado at the Yangpu District Detention Center.

Feng Zhenghu, aged 54, holds a Master's Degree in Economics and was a visiting scholar in Japan before returning to China in 2000. From 2001 to 2004, he served a three-year sentence for “illegal business activities” for independently publishing a Chinese-language version of his Japanese e-book, a handbook of Japanese companies in China. After his release, he began petitioning for his innocence and became a rights activist fighting the wrongful convictions of others. Feng created a Web site, Hu Xian Wei Quan (Protecting the Constitution and Defending the Rights) for reporting, recording and commenting on China's judicial system. On May 22, 2008, he was stopped by the police at the Shanghai Airport as he was leaving for a visit to Japan.

Meanwhile, PEN continues to receive regular reports of violations of the freedom to write in China. On May 17, Guo Quan, a writer and former associate professor of literature at Nanjing Normal University, was detained for his articles on the government's response to the earthquake. He was released on May 28.

This past week, PEN received reports that Dr. Liu Xiaobo, a prominent dissident writer, board member and former president of the Independent Chinese PEN Center, has been harassed by authorities in recent days. On the evening of June 4, police from the National Security Unit of Beijing Police Security Bureau manhandled him as he was leaving his parents-in-law's home after he refused to answer their questions. Several police reportedly hit his head and grabbed his neck and arms to force him into a small guard box without windows. He was released an hour and a half later, but is now reportedly under surveillance at his home in Beijing.

Dr. Liu was originally imprisoned for two years for participating in the 1989 pro-democracy movement, and was held at a re-education through labor camp for another three years from 1996 to 1999 for criticizing the government. Although his movements are constantly monitored, he has continued to speak out for freedom of expression in China.

PEN American Center, PEN Canada, and the Independent Chinese PEN Center are among the 145 worldwide centers of International PEN, an organization that works to promote friendship and intellectual co-operation among writers everywhere, to fight for freedom of expression, and represent the conscience of world literature. On December 10, 2007, the centers launched We Are Ready for Freedom of Expression, an Olympic countdown campaign to protest China's imprisonment of at least 42 writers and journalists and to seek an end to internet censorship and other restrictions on the freedom to write in that country. For more information, please visit www.pen.org/china2008, www.pencanada.ca, and www.chinesepen.org.

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