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Writers Decry Conviction of Leading Dissident for Criticizing Beijing Olympics

Hu Jia handed 3 1/2 year sentence for “inciting subversion”

New York, Toronto, Stockholm—Calling today’s sentencing hearing for dissident writer and human rights defender Hu Jia “a discouraging sign of China’s indifference both to the basic rights of its citizens and to world opinion,” PEN called on President Hu Jintao to intervene personally in the case to secure the 34 year-old activist’s immediate release.

A freelance journalist and blogger, Hu Jia is a leading Chinese human rights, environmental, and AIDS activist. He was arrested December 27, 2007 at his home in Beijing on suspicion of “inciting subversion of state power” after publishing a letter entitled “The Real China and the Olympics” and other pieces critical of the Chinese government, and for giving testimony to the European Parliament via webcam. He was officially charged on January 30, 2008 by the Beijing Municipal People’s Procuratorate, and was tried in a four-hour proceeding on March 18, 2008 in the Beijing Municipal No. 1 Intermediate People’s Court. Hu Jia, his two defense lawyers, and his wife and mother were present at this morning’s sentencing hearing.

“It is hard to imagine a clearer violation of the universally-guaranteed right to freedom of expression,” PEN American Center President Francine Prose said today in New York. “Hu Jia is being jailed for expressing his views about China’s human rights record and its fitness to host the Olympics in six articles and two interviews – activities that are clearly protected by both Chinese and international law. Sentencing Mr. Hu to 3 and 1/2 years in prison just over four months before the Opening Ceremonies threatens to erase what little credibility remained in the pledges China made to secure the Games.”

In Toronto, PEN Canada President Nelofer Pazira stressed that Chinese authorities must act quickly to fulfill its commitments to expanding and safeguarding the rights of its citizens. “On behalf of the members of PEN Canada and of our colleagues at PEN American Center and the Independent Chinese PEN Center, I ask President Hu Jintao to intercede in this case and the cases of 37 of our other colleagues who are also in prison for insisting on their freedom to write, and to facilitate their immediate, unconditional release.”