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China fails to deliver: an Olympic-Year Report Card on Free Expression from PEN

New York, Toronto, Stockholm, July 8, 2008—In a distressing report released today, three International PEN centres including PEN CANADA give China a failing grade on free expression one month before the opening of the Beijing Olympic Games on August 8, 2008.

The report, **Failing to Deliver: An Olympic-Year Report Card on Free Expression in China** finds that the climate for freedom of expression in China has measurably deteriorated over the past year, in full view of the international community.

In December 2007, PEN Canada, American PEN Canada, and the Independent Chinese PEN Center were following the cases of 40 writers and journalists imprisoned in China. Today, after numerous additional detentions and a few releases, PEN is following the cases of 51 writers, 44 of whom are still in prison.

“If China had fulfilled its pledges to protect and expand human rights in the run-up to the Olympics, it could now be poised to take a major step forward on the international stage,” said Larry Siems, Director of the Freedom to Write and International Programs of PEN American Center. “Instead, as this report makes clear, the world has witnessed a grinding, relentless campaign to jail or silence prominent dissident voices and new and brazen efforts to control domestic and international press.”

“It is not too late,” said Marian Botsford Fraser of PEN Canada. “There’s still time for China to make good on the commitments it offered its own citizens and the international community when it bid to host the Olympics. With one month before the Opening Ceremonies, we are asking the world to join us in holding the Chinese government to its pledges.”

According to the report, available at http://www.pencanada.ca/media/One_month_report-final.pdf :

- there are more writers and journalists in Chinese prisons than there were seven months ago;
- dissident writers and journalists not in prison face serious restrictions on their movements and on their ability to speak and publish freely;
- Internet censorship and other laws such as subversion and inciting separatism or splittism are regularly used to deny the universally-guaranteed right to freedom of expression;
- China’s promises to allow media to report freely throughout China have been undermined by its attempts to manage international coverage from Tibet and earthquake-affected areas and by its refusal to extend any new protections whatsoever to Chinese journalists.

The report recommends that the Chinese government:

- release all writers and journalists currently imprisoned and stop detaining, harassing, and censoring writers and journalists in China;
- end Internet censorship, and reform laws used to imprison writers and journalists and suppress freedom of expression; and
- abide by its pledge that “there will be no restrictions on media reporting and movement of journalists up to and including the Olympic Games.”

In addition, the report urges that all nations participating in the Olympic Games press the Chinese government to act on these recommendations and secure clear assurances that no Chinese citizens,

Chinese or foreign journalists, athletes or spectators will be detained or otherwise prevented from expressing their views peacefully during the 2008 Summer Olympic Games.

Yu Zhang of the Independent Chinese PEN Center stressed that fostering respect for basic rights is essential for China's future. "In the end, it is not by staging a successful Olympic Games, but by honoring these commitments that China's slogan "One World, One Dream" will become true," Zhang said.

PEN Canada, American PEN, and the Independent Chinese PEN Center are among the 145 worldwide centers of International PEN, an organization that works to promote friendship and intellectual cooperation among writers everywhere, to fight for freedom of expression, and represent the conscience of world literature. For the "Failing to Deliver" report and the complete list of writers, please visit www.pencanada.ca, www.penorg and www.chinesePEN.org.

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