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Detentions Escalate at China Quake Site

New York, Toronto, Stockholm, June 13, 2008—PEN expressed alarm today over the disappearance of leading cyber-dissident Huang Qi, who was last seen being forced into a car by three unidentified men in Chengdu on the evening of June 10. His detention comes amid an escalated effort by the Chinese government to establish tighter controls over reporting from earthquake-affected areas.

Huang, director and co-founder of the Tianwang Human Rights Center in Chengdu, had been imprisoned on subversion charges from 2003 to 2005 for setting up a web site that investigated corruption, advocated democracy, and called for the release of those imprisoned in the wake of the Tiananmen protests. PEN fears that Huang has been detained by plainclothes police and may be held incommunicado in connection with his criticism of the government's handling of the May 12th Sichuan earthquake.

Two employees working for Tianwang, Internet writer Huang Xiaomin and webmaster Zhang Qi, had been detained on May 16 after declaring their intentions to join rescue activities in Sichuan. Huang Xiaomin was released after 15 days, and reports that he was extensively questioned by police about his relation to Huang Qi and their activities at Tianwang. Zhang Qi is still being held incommunicado.

It has also been reported that Zeng Hongling, a 53-year-old retired worker from Mianyang, a city hard-hit by the earthquake, was detained while staying with relatives in Chengdu on June 9 on suspicion of “illegally providing information overseas” for articles published on an overseas Chinese web site. The articles, part of a series entitled “The Accounts of My Personal Experiences During the Earthquake,” were published along with her own photographs under a pen name, Shanshan. Zeng was taken by five plainclothes police officers from the Public Security Bureau (PSB) of Mianyang and is being held incommunicado at the Detention Center of the Mianyang PSB.

PEN has also received confirmation that Chen Daojun, a freelance writer and journalist detained in Chengdu since May 9, has now been charged with “inciting splittism,” not “inciting subversion of state power” as had been initially reported. The charge, most often used against Tibetans and Uighurs in China, most likely stems from an article Chen published following the Tibetan protests which declared respect to the Tibetan people, defended their basic rights and condemned the Chinese government's violent crackdown on protesters.

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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