

## **CHINA: Countdown to the Olympics**

### **Women Writing Under Surveillance in China**

Five months exactly before the opening of the Beijing Olympics on August 8, 2008, International PEN is marking International Women's Day (March 8) by celebrating the work of three women writers under threat in China – **Zeng Jinyan, Tsering Woeser** and **Li Jianhong**. While not actually detained, they are among many lesser-known dissidents suffering wide-ranging forms of harassment, including brief detentions, periods of house arrest, travel restrictions, loss of work, denial of access to information and communications, heavy surveillance and censorship.

Each of these women continues to write in the face of great personal risk. They use the Internet to tell their stories and those of others living through similar injustices in China. Although they are all banned within China itself, they strive to keep their voices heard, using what freedom remains to them to seek out overseas Chinese websites, publishers, and foreign news outlets. Amidst signs of an apparent crackdown on dissent as the Olympic games approach, aimed at silencing those who may attempt to use the Games as an opportunity to raise criticism of the authorities, there are fears that all three women are at increasing risk of arrest and lengthy imprisonment.

**International PEN's Writers in Prison Committee is therefore calling upon its members to protest the restrictions imposed on Zeng Jinyan, Tsering Woeser and Li Jianhong, and demand that they are allowed to live and work freely, in accordance with Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which China is a signatory.**

#### **Zeng Jinyan**



Twenty-four year-old Zeng Jinyan is a Chinese human rights activist and internet writer. She was placed under house arrest on 27 December 2007 following the arrest of her husband, Hu Jia, at their shared flat in the ironically-named BoBo Freedom City, a Beijing suburb close to the site of the Olympic stadium. Hu Jia is prominent environmentalist and AIDS activist, accused of inciting subversion against the Chinese government. Their baby daughter Qianci, born in November 2007, was barely a month old at the time of her father's arrest.

The couple have been under the watchful eye of the authorities for over two years, and spent much of 2006 restricted to their apartment by the security services. During this time, Hu Jia made a documentary entitled 'Prisoners of Freedom City' (which can be viewed on [You.Tube.com](http://You.Tube.com)), whilst Zeng Jinyan wrote a daily web-log about her experience of life under surveillance.

Zeng Jinyan began Internet writing in early 2006 to publicize her husband's 41-day detention, his successive and extended house arrests, and their shared life of surveillance, threats and harassments. Through her daily weblog she connected with many others in China who suffered similar experiences, and she began re-telling their stories too. She quickly became a prominent human rights reporter and campaigner, and inevitably attracted the attention of the authorities. In September 2006 the Chinese authorities blocked mainland access to her weblog, and but she continued to write for overseas websites. Since her husband's arrest, her phone line and internet access have been cut, and as many as fifty security officers are currently guarding her apartment.



### Tsering Woesser

Award-winning Tibetan writer and poet, Woesser was born in 1966 in Lhasa, Tibet Autonomous Region, where her father was a soldier in the People's Liberation Army. As a child of the Cultural Revolution, she was raised and educated entirely in the Chinese language, and never learned to read or write in her native Tibetan. Ironically, it is this that has enabled her to be such an influential voice, and she is said to be the first Tibetan to have played the role of a public intellectual in China. She writes to both a Han (Chinese) and a Tibetan audience, and her writings are said to give public expression for the first time to the emotions and experiences of a people and a culture previously hidden from the mainstream.

Woesser studied Chinese literature at the Southwest Nationalities College in Chendu, and began her professional career as a reporter for the *Gardze Daily* newspaper in the province of Kham, Sichuan province, western China. In March 1990, she became editor of the Lhasa-based Chinese-language literary journal *Tibetan Literature*. This was the start of her political awakening. She began writing poetry, and read translations of foreign books smuggled into Tibet critical of the Chinese government. Woesser's first book was published in 1999, a collection of poems entitled *Xizang Zai Shang* (*Tibet Above*). She soon became a highly acclaimed and prolific writer in Chinese. Through her education, journalistic training and literary expertise, Woesser became a member Tibet's 'Chinese Writers' Group', a small literary elite of Tibetans writing in the Chinese language.

Woesser's troubles began with her second book *Xizang Biji* (*Notes on Tibet*), a collection of short stories and prose published in Guanzhou in January 2003. The book was a best-seller in China, and was banned in September of that year for revealing opinions 'harmful to the unification and solidarity of our nation'. In June 2004 she was dismissed from her position at the Tibet Autonomous Region Literature Association, and left Lhasa for Beijing in order to 'follow her conscience as a writer'. She continues to write from a small Beijing apartment where she lives with her husband, writer Wang Lixiong, posting poetry and essays on Tibetan culture on the

Internet and publishing her books in Taiwan. In mainland China her books are banned, her two web-logs have been shut down, she is unemployed and her movements are sometimes restricted. Yet she has become widely known as one of China's most respected writers on Tibet.

### **Li Jianhong**



Chinese freelance internet writer Li Jianhong (pen-name 'Xiao Qiao') was born in the city of Bangbu, Anhui Province, in 1968. She graduated from Huadong Normal University in Shanghai with a MA in North American studies in 1994, and has since worked as a teacher, journalist and administrative manager. Li is a leading Shanghai-based dissident, and vocal advocate for freedom of expression and the press. In August 2002 Li Jianhong founded and edited an independent Chinese website *Qimeng Luntan* (*Enlightenment Forum*), followed by *Ziyou Zhongguo Luntan* (*Free China Forum*),

both of which are now blocked.

She has been subject to intense police harassment since January 2005 for her critical writings published online and peaceful dissident activities. She has suffered numerous brief detentions and interrogations, repeated periods of house arrest, and several dismissals from posts of employment. She is a member of Independent Chinese PEN Centre (ICPC), and was a recipient of the 2007 Lin Zhao Memorial Award but was prevented from collecting the award. For an account of the crackdown on the awards dinner hosted by the ICPC at which she was to be honored, see the following link: <http://pen.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/1860/prmID/172>