

# PEN CANADA

for FREEDOM of EXPRESSION

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## PEN writer and Chinese citizen, Yu Zhang, denied entry to Hong Kong for World Press Freedom Day conference

**London, Toronto, New York, Stockholm:** April 30, 2008—Members of International PEN protest in the strongest possible terms the refusal yesterday of Hong Kong officials to allow distinguished Chinese journalist Dr. Yu Zhang, Secretary-General of the Independent Chinese PEN Center, into Hong Kong, where he was invited to chair a session at a World Press Freedom Day Conference.

Yu Zhang was held for ten hours without explanation at Hong Kong Airport when he arrived from Sweden via London and then was forced to take a flight to London and then Sweden later the same day, according to Hong Kong Journalists Association official Mak Yin-ting.

“They used various uncivilized means, including cheating (because they never intended to let me in) and threatening physical abuse, to force me to leave the soil of my own country immediately, regardless of my request for time with my lawyer to challenge their decision in Hong Kong,” said Yu Zhang, who returned home at noon today. “This is an obvious indication that the negative impact of the Beijing Olympics on Chinese citizens’ rights is increasing as the Games draw near, expanding beyond mainland China at least to Hong Kong.”

Yu Zhang has twice in the past year been prevented from entering Beijing, verbally accused of “endangering the national security.” But this is the first time he has been prevented from entering Hong Kong.

The four-day **One Dream: Freedom of Expression** meeting is being held to “reaffirm the freedoms that already exist in Hong Kong and raise the question of why [such a meeting] cannot take place in Beijing nor anywhere else in the country—although freedom of expression is a universal civil right guaranteed in China’s Constitution and in the international covenants to which China claims adherence,” said the conference’s statement of intent. May 3 is World Press Freedom Day; the

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meeting, attended by international freedom of expression organizations, aims to send a clear message to the Chinese government: **Make the Freedom of Expression Dream a Reality in China.**

“The ironies in this situation are painful,” said Isobel Harry, executive director of PEN Canada. “Holding this conference in Hong Kong was to demonstrate that the Chinese people are ready, not only for the Olympics, but for freedom of expression. But the Chinese government is not only not ready, it is becoming increasingly repressive.”

Since December 2007, the Independent Chinese PEN Center has worked with PEN Canada and PEN American Center on a Countdown to the Olympics campaign highlighting the cases of writers imprisoned in China for expressing their opinions on human rights issues in China. The number of imprisoned writers has been as high as 42, and currently sits at 39; the most recent sentence was handed down to freelance journalist and blogger, **Hu Jia**, a leading human rights, environmental, and AIDS activist.

“If this is the situation in Hong Kong, 100 days before the Olympics and just before World Press Freedom Day, what’s next?” asked Larry Siems, Director of Freedom to Write and International Programs at PEN American Center, “We urge the Chinese government to reverse this trend and honour the promises made in bidding for the Olympic Games to improve human rights for its citizens and permit freedom of the press.”

Dr. Yu Zhang is a Chinese citizen, a research scientist with permanent residence in Sweden. After the 1989 Beijing Massacre he helped to found a human rights association of Chinese students. In 1990, he founded *Nordic Chinese*, as its publisher and editing director, and later as chief editor until it ceased publication in 1997. In 1999, he joined *Tong Xun*, an Oslo-based Chinese magazine as editor. In 2002 he joined the Independent Chinese PEN Center (ICPC), where he is currently its Secretary-General and Coordinator of its Writers in Prison Committee.

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. For more information on the coalition’s China campaign, please visit [www.pen.org/china2008](http://www.pen.org/china2008), [www.pencanada.ca](http://www.pencanada.ca), and [www.chinesepen.org](http://www.chinesepen.org).

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