

PEN CANADA

for FREEDOM *of* EXPRESSION

Li Zhi is an Internet writer and financial official in the Dazhou municipal government, Sichuan Province. He was arrested on August 8, 2003, by Sichuan Province State Security Police after posting an essay on an overseas Web site that accused Sichuan officials of corruption. Police seized his computer.

Li was officially charged on September 3 with "conspiracy to subvert state power" for having contact with foreign-based dissidents. The Dazhou Intermediate People's Court sentenced Li, aged 33, to eight years in prison on December 11. He planned to appeal the ruling. Observers said the punishment was particularly harsh for a cyber-dissident.

Li is imprisoned in Sichuan Province and is said to be suffering from a worsening Hepatitis B condition.

The action against Li is part of a broader government crackdown that shows official intolerance of online freedom of expression. Government surveillance of e-mail messages and discussion forums to track down regime dissidents is routinely practised. The Internet has become a major target of the regime since three laws governing it were adopted in 2000. Some 30 cyber-dissidents are said to be in prison throughout the country for expressing their opinions.

PEN Canada deplores the persecution of individuals seeking to express their views peacefully over the Internet. We believe that Li Zhi has been jailed in violation of his right to freedom of expression, as guaranteed by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We call for his immediate and unconditional release.

Please send appeals to:

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