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International PEN calls Liu Xiaobo's sentence a grievous betrayal of inalienable human rights

LONDON, UK/TORONTO, CANADA, December 25, 2009— International PEN, the world's leading freedom of expression organization with 145 member centres in 104 countries, calls today's sentencing of prominent Chinese dissident **Liu Xiaobo** a grievous betrayal of his inalienable rights as a Chinese citizen.

In what amounts to a show trial, after weeks of courageous solidarity shown by hundreds of Chinese writers, intellectuals, and citizens, Dr. Liu was sentenced to 11 years in prison and two years deprivation of political rights on charges of "incitement to subversion of state power," for his role in writing and publishing *Charter 08*, a document calling for political reform and human rights.

"Liu Xiaobo's case is about agreed international human rights standards, not merely the internal affairs of China," said **John Ralston Saul**, President of International PEN. "China is signatory to international treaties and conventions, and cannot be given a free pass when it acts against its own and international standards."

On December 23, 2009, Liu Xiaobo was tried by the Beijing First Intermediate People's Court. Lawyers for the defence attended the two-hour trial but were prohibited from disclosing details. Liu's wife and foreign diplomats were barred from the trial, probably held to coincide with an international holiday to diminish press coverage.

That morning, a Beijing-based woman writer **Liu Di** (aka Stainless Steel Mouse on Internet) declared her intention to give herself up as one of the "signatories and organizing plotters" of Charter 08. Liu wrote, "For the dignity of Constitution and laws, and for no more imprisonment of the people for their independent opinions, I would prefer to share with Mr. Liu Xiaobo the same case with the same penalty." She was taken away outside the courthouse before the trial began and has reportedly been held by police in a hotel, to be released later today.

On 10 December 2009 (International Human Rights Day), more than 300 other signatories of the Charter released an open letter supporting Liu entitled 'We Are Willing to Share Responsibility with Liu Xiaobo'. Liu Xiaobo was formally indicted the following day.

"International PEN applauds the courage of all those in the Peoples' Republic of China who risk their freedom for speaking and writing their minds," said **Marian Botsford Fraser**, Chair of the Writers in Prison Committee of International PEN. "We join our Chinese colleagues in their steadfast conviction that *Charter 08* will be judged by history as the just act of citizens fighting for human rights, freedom and democracy."

Charter 08 was initially signed by over 300 scholars, journalists, freelance writers and activists and now has over 10,000 signatories from throughout China. For more information about Liu Xiaobo and Charter 08:

www.internationalpen.org.uk

For Liu Di statement: www.pencanada.ca

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BACKGROUND: Liu Xiaobo first received support from PEN twenty years ago, when, in 1989, he was one of a group of writers and intellectuals given the label the “Black Hands of Beijing” by the government, and arrested for their leading roles in the Tiananmen Square protests. Liu has since spent a total of five years in prison, including a three year sentence of Re-education Through Labour passed in 1996-1999, and he has suffered frequent short arrests, harassment and censorship. He is among over forty writers detained today in the People's Republic of China for the peaceful expression of their opinions. Liu is a former president of the Independent Chinese PEN Center (ICPC). Liu Di, a member of ICPC, was detained without trial for a year in 2002-2003.

International PEN demands the immediate and unconditional release of dissident writer Liu Xiaobo and all those detained in China for the peaceful exercise of their opinions, in accordance with Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which China is a signatory.