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internationales literaturfestival  berlin

Freedom for Liu Xiaobo

The internationales literaturfestival berlin appeals for a signing of this letter and a worldwide reading on 20th March 2011 of the co-authored 'Charter 08' and the poem 'You wait for me with Dust' by Liu Xiaobo, Nobel Peace Prize laureate for 2010.

Liu Xiaobo is currently the world's only winner of the Nobel Peace Prize still held in detention. In 2009, after co-authoring 'Charter 08', a manifesto calling for greater freedoms and democracy in China, Liu Xiaobo was sentenced to eleven years in prison on a spurious charge of "inciting subversion of state power". His continued imprisonment is a basic breach of human rights, and also a violation of China's own constitution where Article 35 states that "Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of procession and of demonstration".

1936 was the last time neither the winner, German journalist and pacifist Carl von Ossietzky, nor any of his family members, could go to Oslo to collect the Nobel Peace Prize. They were all barred from leaving Nazi Germany. This historical comparison should disturb the Chinese government

China has made extraordinary economic progress over the last few decades. The country is now the world's second largest economy, and a powerful player on the global stage. China is rightly proud of these achievements, but it should also value democracy.

The preamble to 'Charter 08' states that "*Chinese citizens are becoming increasingly aware that freedom, equality, and human rights are universal values shared by all humankind, and that democracy, republicanism, and constitutional government make up the basic institutional framework of modern politics. A "modernization" bereft of these universal values and this basic political framework is a disastrous process that deprives people of their rights, rots away their humanity, and destroys their dignity. Where is China headed in the 21st century? Will it continue with this "modernization" under authoritarian rule, or will it endorse universal values, join the mainstream civilization, and build a democratic form of government?*"ⁱ

Now is China's chance to take a magnanimous step towards democracy. China can do this immediately – by showing pride that one of its citizens, Liu Xiaobo, has received the world's greatest award in recognition of a struggle to uphold human rights. This award should be an honour for China, too.

In 2005, Liu Xiaobo wrote:

"Didn't they say that China was in a golden moment of historical peak, and that the state of human rights is at the very best? Didn't they say that the present government wants to treat "the people as the foundation" in order to build a "harmonious society"? Then why is the government which has built the golden and

almighty China so panicky? Why in this "harmonious society" in which "the people are the foundation" are I and other dissidents treated like trash to be stomped upon? Why must the "harmonious society" be constructed only with police officers posted at stations?"ⁱⁱ

It does not befit a great country to denounce the Nobel Peace Prize, expand the restrictive security net around a peace laureate to include his friends and relatives, and persuade foreign diplomats to boycott the prize ceremony. Since the prize announcement, there has been no let-up in the harassment of Liu's family and supporters, and all others attempting free speech activities in China. Liu Xiaobo's wife, Liu Xia, is under house arrest. Several Chinese human rights activists have been prevented from leaving the country in case they go to Oslo, and Liu's brothers are pessimistic about their chances of being able to travel in his place.

Chinese citizens make up one fifth of the world's population. Liu Xiaobo's case is not the story of one man: he is a symbol of the aspirations and treatment of 1.3 billion people.

The call for worldwide readings of 'Charter 08', and Liu Xiaobo's poem 'You Wait for me with Dust', signify support for the campaigner, and a call for his release from prison.

A courageous activist all his life, Liu Xiaobo once wrote that "*in a dictatorial country, open letters signed by individuals or groups form an important method for the civilians to resist dictatorship and fight for freedom.*"ⁱⁱⁱ And so we, citizens of the world, sign this appeal – some with our names, and many, many more with our voices, which will be raised on 20th March 2011 to read Liu's words – and show solidarity with him, and others in China, who are not free to say what they want.

We will continue to speak up until there is an end to the unjust incarceration of Liu Xiaobo, and others like him.

To sign this appeal, please reply to this email giving the following information:

Name
City
Country

The appeal, together with a list of signatories, will be published around the world on 20th of March, the day of the WorldWideReading.

We welcome all participants and ideas for the "Freedom for Liu Xiaobo"-readings to be held on 20th March 2011. If you would like to take part, please contact: worldwidereading@literaturfestival.com

ⁱ Extract from *Charter 08*, translated from the Chinese by Human Rights in China

ⁱⁱ Extract from *If the policemen are posted outside my door*, by Liu Xiaobo

ⁱⁱⁱ Extract from *Me and the Internet*, by Liu Xiaobo