

Press Release
11 February 2009

A Joint Statement on the Sentence of Liu Xiaobo and Tan Zuoren

Today, three days before the Chinese Lunar New Year, the Beijing Municipal High People's Court upholds the first instance sentence against the appeal by Dr. Liu Xiaobo, one of the drafters of the Charter 08. We, the undersigned, strongly protest against and condemn such a perverse act defying world trends and opinions.

On Christmas Day last year, the Beijing Municipal Number One Intermediate People's Court severely sentenced Dr. Liu to eleven years imprisonment on the charge of "inciting subversion of state power" for a few sentences in the Charter 08 that he participated in drafting, and a few sentences in six articles he wrote several years ago. This has made a record of maximum penalty for this offence since its inclusion in the Criminal Code in 1997, which marks the beginning of the darkest and coldest winter of China's contemporary literary inquisition in the last 30 years since the "spring of reform and opening-up". Two days ago, the Chengdu Municipal Intermediate People's Court in Sichuan Province, sentenced Tan Zuoren, an environmentalist, to five years imprisonment on the same charge just for a long memo based on his dairy on June Fourth Event in 1989, setting up a new record of even severer sentencing per piece of publication than that of Liu's case. This indicates that the situation of freedom of expression in China continues to deteriorate as the winter continues to become colder and darker.

However, we firmly believe that the world trends are irresistible and that the public opinions cannot be ignored for long. When winter has come, can spring be far behind? Light is there at the end of darkness.

The former President of Czech Republic Mr. Vaclav Havel, the former Prime Minister Mr. Mikulas Dzurinda of Slovakia, The President of PEN American Centre Prof. Kwame Anthony Appiah, Nobel Prize laureates Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the Dalai Lama and Ms. Herta Müller, and more and more statesmen, legislators, academics, professors, writers, human rights activists and other celebrities have announced their nomination of and support to Dr. Liu Xiao for the Nobel Peace Prize, which has got tens of thousands of the respondents, representing marks the irresistible warmth and bright in this darkest and coldest winter.

Therefore, we call on the international community to continue urging the Chinese authorities to recognize world trends, comply with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which China is a signatory, and immediately and unconditionally release Liu Xiaobo, Tan Zuoren and all others imprisoned for their opinions of conscience.

Cosigned by organizations:

Independent Chinese PEN Center
Hong Kong Journalists Association
Beijing Spring
The Qi's Cultural Foundation
Princeton China Initiative
Support Network for the Persecuted in China
Hong Kong Chinese PEN
Laogai Research Foundation
China Human Rights Lawyers Concern Group
South African PEN
Trieste PEN
Sierra Leone PEN
Hong Kong Alliance In Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China
Justice and Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese
Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union Croatian PEN
Catalan PEN
Sydney PEN

and by individuals:

Eugene Schoulgin, international secretary of International PEN and past chairman of its
Writers in Prison Committee
Dr. Karin Clark, former chairperson of Writers-in-Prison Committee of International
PEN and German writer
Chaim Noll, German-Israeli writer born in former GDR
Joanne Leedom-Ackerman, Vice President of International PEN

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