

Oral Statement by Society for Threatened Peoples

a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

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Language: English only
Human Rights Council
17th session

03 June 2011

Item 3 (“Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development”)

Thank you Mr. President.

The Society for Threatened Peoples (STP) welcomes the report (A/HRC/17/27 and A/HRC/17/27/Add.1) of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Mr. Frank La Rue, in which he recognizes the criminalization of legitimate expression through the imprisonment of bloggers around the world. He highlights the situation in China with at least 72 imprisoned blogger at the end of 2010 and one of the world’s most sophisticated and extensive systems for controlling information on the Internet.

Also the STP is deeply concerned about the ongoing violation of freedom of opinion and expression in China especially against its national minorities like the Uyghurs and Tibetans. Since the 5 July 2009 events in Urumqi, the regional capital of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), at least a dozen Uyghur journalists, blogger and website staffs, among them Gheyret Niyaz, Gulmire Imin, Memetjan Abdulla, Dilshat Perhat, Nijat Azat, Nureli and Tursunjan Hezim have been sentenced to harsh prison terms, including life imprisonment, in closed and unfair trials and under false charges. The aim of these sentences is clear: to silence any form of Uyghur dissent and to discourage Uyghurs from raising their voices in favor of Uyghur human rights.

We call on the Human Rights Council (HRC) to strongly support the full respect of freedom of expression in China and to urge the Chinese government to unconditionally and immediately release all imprisoned Uyghur media workers.

Mr. President,

in his report, the Special Rapporteur also reiterates that the protection of national security or countering terrorism cannot be used to justify restrictions on the right to expression.

However, China and other Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states are regularly equating Uyghurs’ peaceful activities including the exercise of freedom of speech with terrorism, separatism, and extremism.

As an example, the Uyghur refugee Ershidin Israel has been extradited from Kazakhstan to China three days ago (31 May 2011) after Kazakhstan’s Supreme Court refused to grant him political asylum, despite the urgent appeal on Mr. Israel sent by four UN special procedures mandate holders to the Kazakh authorities back in July 2010. Mr. Israel fled China in September 2009 after having provided information to Radio Free Asia (www.rfa.org) about the torture to death of the Uyghur man Shohret Tursun at the hands of Chinese security forces. Kazakh authorities have held Mr. Israel since June 2010 amid Chinese accusations he was involved in "terrorism activities." However, the STP firmly believes that these accusations are fabricated and an attempt to punish him for leaking Mr. Tursun’s case.

The STP urges the Human Rights Council to demand China and Kazakhstan to disclose Mr. Israel's current whereabouts, legal status and well-being. The Human Rights Council must also look into the SCO member states' ongoing prioritization of questionable regional commitments over their international human rights obligations – particularly those obligations enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention against Torture, and the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.

I thank you Mr. President.