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## People's Republic of China

# The Olympics countdown – broken promises

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Summary

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With the Olympics less than two weeks away, it is time to assess progress made by the Chinese authorities to improve human rights in line with their own commitments made in 2001 when the International Olympic Committee (IOC) chose Beijing to host the Games. Regrettably, since the publication of Amnesty International's last Olympics Countdown report on 1 April 2008, there has been no progress towards fulfilling these promises, only continued deterioration. Unless the authorities make a swift change of direction, the legacy of the Beijing Olympics will not be positive for human rights in China.

In March 2004, the Chinese authorities amended the Constitution to include the clause: "the State respects and protects human rights". While human rights encompass a broad range of issues, Amnesty International has been monitoring the Chinese government's performance particularly closely in four areas with a direct link to preparations for the Olympics and in line with the core principles of the Olympic Charter. This report provides a final summary and updates developments in these four key areas which are: the continuing use of the death penalty; abusive forms of administrative detention; the arbitrary detention, imprisonment, ill-treatment and harassment of human rights defenders, including journalists and lawyers; and the censorship of the internet.

In fact, the crackdown on human rights defenders, journalists and lawyers has intensified because Beijing is hosting the Olympics. The authorities have stepped up repression of dissident voices in their efforts to present an image of "stability" and "harmony" to the outside world. This has resulted in the detention and imprisonment of those who wish to draw attention to the other side of the picture, which includes human rights violations perpetrated in preparation for the Games.

Two recent crisis situations in the west of China have challenged the authorities to demonstrate that their human rights commitments are more than empty words. The recent protests in Tibet and Tibetan-populated areas of surrounding provinces and the subsequent crackdown and media silence imposed by authorities highlighted not only longstanding and unresolved violations of fundamental human rights but also on-going censorship of the media. In contrast, the authorities initially responded to the effects of the devastating earthquake in Sichuan province with uncharacteristic openness, allowing relatively free media access to the region. However, media

control tightened as local families began public protests calling for accountability of local officials, especially with regard to the collapse of schools which were allegedly poorly constructed.

Shortly after awarding the Games to Beijing in 2001, Jacques Rogge, President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) publicly stated his expectation that hosting the Olympics would improve China's human rights record, adding that the IOC would act if human rights were not acted upon to their satisfaction. However, the IOC has shown a reluctance to speak out on human rights in the context of the preparations for the Games in a specific, consistent and forceful way.

The IOC's diplomatic, non-public approach on human rights cases and issues does not appear to have yielded significant results. International pressure from other governments for human rights reform has also been insufficient, sending a message that it is acceptable for a government to host the Olympic Games in an atmosphere characterised by repression and persecution. The danger now becomes that after the Olympic Games these patterns of serious human rights violations may continue or intensify with even less attention paid by the international community than has been the case so far.

The report concludes with a set of five recommendations to the Chinese authorities, distilled from previous recommendations issued by Amnesty International in the run up to the Olympics, as well as further recommendations to the IOC and other governments, including world leaders planning to attend the Games.

<b>KEYWORDS:</b>
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This report summarizes a 16-page document (7,592 words): *People's Republic of China: The Olympics countdown – broken promises*, (Index: ASA 17/089/2008) issued by Amnesty International in July 2008. Anyone wishing further details or to take action on this issue should consult the full document. An extensive range of our materials on this and other subjects is available at <http://www.amnesty.org> and Amnesty International news releases can be received by email: [http://www.amnesty.org/email/email\\_updates.html](http://www.amnesty.org/email/email_updates.html)

**INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT, 1 EASTON STREET, LONDON WC1X 0DW, UNITED KINGDOM**