

Proposed by Swedish PEN
Seconded by PEN Uyghur

The Assembly of Delegates of PEN International, on its 86th annual Congress online, 2 to 6 November 2020;

PEN International is increasingly concerned over the systematic erosion of the right to freedom of expression in the People's Republic of China (PRC), and the ongoing government crackdown against those who engage in peaceful expression. These concerns echo those expressed in previous years through resolutions adopted at several of its annual Congresses, most recently at its 85th World Congress in September 2019. Despite some welcome releases since then, including Huang Xiaomin, Xu Lin and Liu Xianbin,[1] the public space for free speech has continued to erode across the country. At least 12 members of the Independent Chinese PEN Centre (ICPC) are still imprisoned or detained, while dozens more have suffered various forms of harassment and travel restrictions, reflecting the ongoing persecution of the Centre's membership. In the 2019 Case List,[2] PEN International has documented 39 cases of writers in various forms of detention in the PRC, the highest of any country featured.

The severity of the crisis in Xinjiang remains of the utmost urgency. With reports of as many as 1.8 million Uyghur and other minorities being held in extra-judicial re-education camps,[3] the PRC government has shown no sign of relenting in the face of mounting international condemnation.[4] By design, the intensity of the crackdown has had a devastating impact on the Uyghur identity in the region, with detainees forced to undergo intensive political indoctrination and coerced to renounce their deepest beliefs.[5] Among those held in the camps are hundreds of Uyghur writers, poets, scholars, translators, and other public figures, many of whom have had no communication with the outside world since they were indefinitely detained without trial.[6] Examples of those detained include world renowned scholar Rahile Dawut,[7] a leading expert on Uyghur folklore at Xinjiang University, who disappeared without a trace while travelling from Xinjiang to Beijing in December 2017. Perhat Tursun, one of the world's greatest Uyghur writers, was reportedly disappeared by the security services in January 2018 and has been sentenced to sixteen years' imprisonment.[8]

Throughout the PRC, the government has continued its crackdown on civil society, limiting the space for free expression and controlling access to information. Authorities have utilised the latest technological advances to create an increasingly panoptic surveillance apparatus,[9] providing extensive powers to monitor and shape public discourse through censorship and propaganda. The resulting climate of repression impacts every strata of Chinese society, and is perhaps most starkly illustrated by reports that the PRC government initially sought to silence Dr Li Wenliang when he attempted to raise awareness about the dangers of COVID-19,[10] resulting in a public backlash against a government that has prioritised control over the health of its citizens.

Efforts by the PRC government to impose greater controls on society have also accelerated across the country's outer regions. In Hong Kong, a territory which has long acted as a sanctuary for those fleeing persecution in the mainland, the promulgation of the national security law marks the latest assault on the territory's unique rights and protections.[11]

The sweeping language used in the law provides government authorities with broad discretion to arbitrarily redefine the limits of expression,[12] posing a potential threat to anyone who expresses dissenting views of the Hong Kong or PRC governments. PEN International continues to call for the release of three Hong Kong-based writers and publishers, Gui Minhai, Yao Wentian and Wang Jianmin.[13] Gui Minhai, who is a member of ICPC, was last seen on October 2015 in Thailand and has since been detained at an unknown location in the PRC without legal assistance or consular access.[14] A Swedish citizen, Gui's arrest and reported refoulement from Thailand to the PRC provides a stark illustration of the PRC government's ability and increased willingness to aggressively pursue critics beyond its borders.

In Tibet, authorities have actively sought to expand coercive labour initiatives throughout the region,[15] while writers, including Kunchok Tsephel Gopey Tsang and Jo Lobsang Jamyang, remain in prison on spurious security charges.[16] While in Inner Mongolia, recent changes to the educational curriculum that place a greater emphasis on instruction through Mandarin Chinese at the expense of Mongolian-medium instruction has led to mass protests and a subsequent crackdown by the government authorities.[17]

Across the world, the PRC government has increasingly sought to utilise its economic power to reshape international norms and institutions in an effort to project its influence and shield itself from criticism. Universities have been at the forefront of these efforts, and PEN International is highly concerned over numerous reports of PRC government authorities engaging in the censorship, intimidation and surveillance of students and scholars in universities around the globe,[18] undermining the principle of academic freedom that is so vital to the development of critical thinking and the exchange of ideas through free expression.

The Assembly of Delegates of PEN International calls on the government of the People's Republic of China to:

- End the persecution of all writers, poets, journalists and scholars in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, including **Rahile Dawut, Perhat Tursun, Gheyret Niyaz, Memetjan Abdulla, Gulmira Imin, Ilham Tohti, Adil Tunyaz, Yalkun Rozi, Ablajan Awut Ayup, and Omerjan Hasan Bozqir;**
- Release all prisoners held for their peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression in the Tibet Autonomous Region, including **Kunchok Tsephel Gopey Tsang, and Jo Lobsang Janyang;**
- Cease its efforts to censor online expression and to immediately release all internet writers jailed for peacefully expressing their opinions;
- End the implementation of language policies that erode minority language protections and undermine linguistic diversity;
- Release all imprisoned or detained Hong Kong publishers, including **Yao Wentian, Wang Jianmin and Gui Minhai;**
- Release all other writers and journalists imprisoned or detained in the People's Republic of China, including Australian citizen **Yang Hengjun** and ICPC members **Qin Yongmin, Lü Gongsong, Chen Shuqing, Wang Yi, Hu Shigen, Liu Feiyue, and Zhou Yuanzhi,** and honorary members **Lu Jianhua, Guo Quan, Li Tie, Chen Xi, Zhao Haitong, Zhang Haitao, and Wu Gan;**

- Ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which was signed by the PRC government in October 1998;
- Repeal or amend all laws that unduly restrict citizens' ability to exercise their right to freedom of expression, bringing them into line with international standards, including the Criminal Law, Criminal Procedure Law and Cyber Security Law;
- Stop the harassment and persecution of Independent Chinese PEN Centre (ICPC) members, and lift all restrictions on their freedom to exit and enter mainland China, particularly to attend PEN International conferences and to return home;
- Stop targeting Uyghur intellectuals including writers, journalists, and web editors, and immediately close all "re-education camps" which have been built in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region;
- Cease the ill treatment and torture of jailed writers, journalists, and all other political prisoners;
- Cease the practice of using national security, economic and public order charges as a pretext to repress writers, internet dissidents, human rights defenders, scholars and lawyers, and end the practice of using televised confessions, which contravene an individual's right to a fair trial;
- End the practice of intimidating academics, engaging in the surveillance of students, and undermining the principle of academic freedom through economic coercion;
- Undertake a complete and meaningful reform of the Chinese legal system in accordance with international standards and the PRC Constitution to guarantee fair trials with full rights of defence and appeal, the legal practices of attorneys, and a prison system that protects the health and safety of inmates.

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[4] United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. 2020. *UN Experts Call for Decisive Measures to Protect Fundamental Freedoms in*

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- [11] "Hong Kong's National Security Law: 10 Things You Need to Know." 2020. *Amnesty International*. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/lat...>
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