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Clinton Urged to Raise Shi Tao Case at China Internet Summit

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Human Rights in China (HRIC) and Reporters Without Borders (RSF) today issued an open letter to former president Bill Clinton, urging him to raise the case of jailed journalist Shi Tao and encourage Internet companies, especially Yahoo!, to implement their human rights obligations.

President Clinton will be the keynote speaker at the 2005 China Internet Summit, starting on September 10, which brings together CEOs of leading Internet companies from China. The summit, hosted by Yahoo!'s new Chinese partner, Alibaba.com, comes just days after a media outcry over the revelation that Yahoo! Holdings (Hong Kong) Ltd. provided e-mail account information that assisted in the conviction of Shi Tao, who was sentenced to ten years in prison on April 27 for "illegally providing state secrets abroad."

President Clinton once predicted that economic development in China would ultimately bring greater respect for human rights. "President Clinton should take this important opportunity to underscore the international human rights obligations of both states and transnational corporations and other business enterprises. Companies need to take responsibility for the serious repercussions of their complicity in maintaining information censorship and repressive control," said Human Rights in China. "China must honor its commitments under the Beijing 2008 Olympics Action Plan, including encouragement of a free and open information society."

In 2002, Yahoo! became one of many firms to voluntarily sign the "Public Pledge on Self-Discipline for the China Internet Industry." Other U.S. companies, such as Microsoft and Google, have also adapted their services in China in ways that have restricted access to information. "The role that Yahoo! played in securing Shi Tao's conviction does damage to Yahoo!'s brand name," said Reporter Without Borders. "Internet companies must be open on where they stand with respect to their human rights obligations; President Clinton is a good ambassador to relay this message and has a valuable opportunity this Saturday."

Human Rights in China is an international monitoring and advocacy non-governmental organization based in New York and Hong Kong. Founded in March 1989 by Chinese scientists and scholars, it conducts research, education and outreach programs to promote universally recognized human rights and advance the institutional protection of these rights in the People's Republic of China.

Reporters Without Borders defends imprisoned journalists and press freedom throughout the world, as well as the right to inform the public and to be informed, in accordance with Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Reporters Without Borders has nine national sections, representatives in Abidjan, Bangkok, Istanbul, Montreal, Moscow, New York, Tokyo and Washington and more than a hundred correspondents worldwide.