

January–February Update

COMPILED BY JENNIFER ROCKWITZ

SUPPORT FOR POLITICAL DISSIDENTS

In the face of international pressure and advocacy from human rights groups, including leading efforts by HRIC, detained democracy activist Fang Jue was expelled from China on January 24, 2003. A businessman and former government official who had appealed for political and economic reform, Fang was detained in November in what activists said appeared to be a crackdown against dissent before the 16th Party Congress. Fang was not formally charged or tried before being expelled.

HRIC coordinated all press interviews and provided logistical support for Fang Jue during the week following his forced exile. On January 30, HRIC also organized and hosted an informal and thought-provoking discussion on the future of human rights in China between Fang Jue and a group of experts in the fields of law, business and academia. The discussion called attention to the principle that forced exile does not equal progress in human rights, and that democracy activists should be permitted to peacefully express their views freely within their own country.

ARTICLE 23

HRIC has continued its liaison and networking activities with regional Asian NGOs and Hong Kong NGOs in relation to the human rights implications of legislation being drafted in Hong Kong to implement Article 23 of the Basic Law. On January 15, Hong Kong Legislative Council member James To joined political commentator Paul Lin and his wife Marie Yang at HRIC's New York office to discuss the implications of Article 23 for HRIC and other civil society organizations in Hong Kong and China.

On February 7 Nicolas Becquelin represented HRIC's Hong Kong office in a joint press conference organized by the Civil Human Rights Front, a coalition of groups protesting the Hong Kong SAR government's assessment of public submissions on Article 23. HRIC presenting its stand

in English and Chinese press releases, and also assisted in drafting the coalition's joint statement.

U.S. ADVOCACY AND OUTREACH

HRIC's senior staff continue to play active roles in policy debates and discussions. On January 16, Assistant Secretary of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Lorne Craner invited Sharon Hom and Xiao Qiang to attend a policy briefing and update for NGOs at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations.

On January 19, Xiao Qiang was a selected speaker at the American Repertory Theatre production of Children of Herakles at Harvard University. Preceding the Euripides play, Xiao spoke frankly about his personal experience to engage the audience in an informal and intimate conversation about the plight of refugees worldwide.

On March 6, Sharon met with staffers from the State Department's Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Bureau and members of the NGO community to discuss U.S. priorities and goals for the 59th Session of the Human Rights Commission in Geneva.

On March 7, Sharon participated in a teleconference briefing with commissioners and staff of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). As one of the expert panelists, Sharon offered guidance to USCIRF on their agenda in advance of their trip into China.

INTERNATIONAL NGO OUTREACH AND NETWORKING

From January 27-28, Xiao Qiang flew to Brussels to participate in the Democracy Promotion Conference and Steering Committee Meeting for World Movement for Democracy, an NED-initiated global network of activists, practitioners, academics, policy makers and funders engaged in promoting democracy. This conference was in preparation for the April 27 assembly in Durban, South Africa, entitled "Building Democracy for Peace, Development and Human Rights," which will bring together more than 500 democracy activists, practitioners and scholars from around the world.

On January 26, Hong Kong staffer Virginia Lai took part in a leadership-training program in Manila organized by the Asian Federation Against Involuntary

Disappearances (AFAD). Virginia attended on behalf of the Tiananmen Mothers' Campaign, which recently became a member of AFAD.

INTERNATIONAL NGO COLLABORATION

HRIC is a member of La Ligue des Droits de l'Homme (FIDH), an international federation of more than 118 human rights NGOs, and has worked closely with FIDH over the years to raise China issues at UN sessions and EU-China dialogues. Most recently HRIC coordinated and strategized with FIDH to ensure key human rights issues were addressed at the EU-China Dialogue held March 5-6 in Athens.

HRIC has also been networking with several NGOs in preparation for the 59th Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights, to be held March 17-April 24 in Geneva. HRIC and FIDH issued a joint statement for submission to the United Nations' High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), and will also participate in a joint NGO briefing with several Tibetan groups, including the Office of Tibet, International Campaign for Tibet and Free Tibet Campaign, which will focus on political prisoners, effectiveness of bi-lateral dialogues and the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

NEW CRF

During this quarter, HRIC published an issue of CRF entitled "Sustaining Environments." This issue sought to expand the boundaries of what is considered "human rights" by exploring the relationship between rights and the natural environment. Articles in this issue focus on the environmental and health hazards surrounding the "E-waste" business, the massive violation of rights accompanying China's big dam-building projects, and the roadblocks the Chinese government has set up against citizens' complaints regarding the environment.

STAFF NOTES

HRIC welcomes Marketing and Outreach Manager Jeff Gima. Jeff spent many years developing financial and marketing expertise within the communication industry, including work at Paramount Pictures and the Los Angeles Times. He also received an M.A. in Media Studies from New School University before joining HRIC.