

# FAQ ON JUNE FOURTH

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## → What is June Fourth?

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June Fourth refers to the violent crackdown on the 1989 Democracy Movement by the Chinese authorities on June 4, 1989. The 1989 Democracy Movement demonstrations centered on Beijing's sprawling Tiananmen Square, where tens of thousands of students and workers began gathering in mid-April 1989 to press their demands for political reform. The demonstrations soon spread to hundreds of cities across China. But on the night of June 3, 1989, the government ordered the square cleared, moving in tanks and troops which began firing on the unarmed protesters. While no official list of the victims has ever been made public, estimates are that hundreds and possibly thousands were killed, and additional hundreds and perhaps thousands arrested.

## → What triggered the Democracy Movement?

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The protests in Tiananmen Square began on a small scale when students and others began meeting in the area to mourn the death on April 15, 1989, of Hu Yaobang. Hu, a reformer, was forced out of Deng Xiaoping's government in 1987 amid harsh criticism from Deng. The public mourning sparked calls for an official reassessment of Hu, which grew into widespread demands for reform. The students were soon joined by workers and intellectuals. Ultimately, more than one million people marched in the square, carrying banners, shouting slogans, and calling for a dialogue with the government.

## → Where did the demonstrations take place?

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While the largest demonstrations took place in Beijing, in and around Tiananmen Square, large-scale protests also took place in over 400 other Chinese cities. Support movements also sprouted up in Hong Kong, the United States, and elsewhere outside of China.

## → How did the government react to the demonstrations?

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The government initially released statements opposing the demonstrations, but students continued to occupy the square and march through the city. On May 19, Zhao Ziyang, a former premier and Communist Party General Secretary, went to the square and urged students to end their hunger strike. It was his last public appearance, and martial law was declared the next day. Zhao was placed under house arrest, where he remained until his death. As the hunger strike progressed into its third week, the government began to move troops into the city, and checkpoints were established, blocking off the university district. On June 3, the government ordered the People's Liberation Army to clear the square. Following the crackdown, large-scale protests continued in several cities outside of Beijing, but only for a few days before the authorities regained control.

## → How many people were killed or wounded in the crackdown?

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No official list of the wounded or killed was ever released, and there are conflicting estimates. According to an internal Chinese document, more than 2,000 people died in various Chinese cities from June 3-4 and the days immediately following. Other estimates range from 188 to 800. One reason for the uncertainty is suspicion that Chinese troops may have quickly removed and disposed of bodies. Following the crackdown, additional deaths occurred when an unknown number of workers and students were executed for their participation in the protests.

## → How many people were arrested?

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After the crackdown, more than 500 people were imprisoned in Beijing's No. 2 Prison, and an unknown number were detained in other Chinese cities. Hundreds were tried and sentenced to lengthy or life sentences. Most life sentences

## FOREIGN GOVERNMENT ACTION ON JUNE FOURTH

### United States

*Foreign Relations Authorization Act, FY 1990 and 1991*, Public Law 101-246, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 104 (1990): 15, § 902 (the “Tiananmen Square Legislation”).

*Condemning the crackdown on democracy protesters in Tiananmen Square, Beijing, in the People’s Republic of China on the 15th anniversary of that tragic massacre*, HR Res. 655, 108th Cong., 2d Sess., June 1, 2004, [http://thomas.loc.gov/home/gpoxmlc108/hr655\\_1h.xml](http://thomas.loc.gov/home/gpoxmlc108/hr655_1h.xml).

U.S. Congressional-Executive Commission on China, *15 Years After Tiananmen: Is Democracy in China’s Future?*, CECC Hearing, June 3, 2004, <http://www.cecc.gov/pages/hearings/060304/index.php>.

*Urging the European Union to maintain its arms embargo on the People’s Republic of China*, HR Res. 57, 109th Cong., 1st Sess., February 2, 2005, <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d109:h.res.57:>.

*A resolution urging the European Union to maintain its arms export embargo on the People’s Republic of China*, S Res. 59, 109th Cong., 1st Sess., February 17, 2005, <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d109:sr59:>.

U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *The Lifting of the EU Arms Embargo on China*, 109th Cong., 1st Session, March 16, 2005, <http://www.senate.gov/foreign/hearings/2005/hrg050316p2.html>.

### European Union

European Council, *EU Declaration on China*, Madrid, June 26–27, 1989, available at <http://www.sipri.org/contents/expcon/euchidec.html>.

European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution on EU-China Relations*, INI/2005/2161, adopted September 7, 2006, available at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/FindByProcnum.do?lang=2&procnum=INI/2005/2161>.

were later commuted to 18 years in prison, and many individuals were released after serving their sentences in the summer of 2007. However, it is believed that 20 to 200 people are still imprisoned for June Fourth-related offenses.

### → What have foreign governments done in past years to call attention to June Fourth?

Foreign governments, including the United States and the European Union, have taken steps to pressure China to account for its June Fourth actions. These steps include legislative hearings, imposition of an arms embargo, and statements.

### → What have the exile community and Chinese activists done in past years to commemorate June Fourth?

Many different groups, coalitions, and organizations have conducted commemoration activities, including: Beijing Spring Society [北京之春杂志社], China Democracy Party [中国民主党], China Democracy Party World Union [中国民主党世界同盟], Chinese Democratic Society [中华民主学社], Chinese Social Democratic Party [中国社会民主党], Chinese Student Federation in Germany [全德学联], The Committee for Global Commemoration of June Fourth [全球纪念六四委员会], The Epoch Times [大纪元], Federation for a Democratic China [民主中国阵线], Hong Kong Alliance [香港支联会], Hong Kong Forum [香港论坛], Independent Federation of Chinese Students and Scholars in the US [全美中国学生学者自治联合会], Liberal Intellectual Association of Australia [澳大利亚自由文化人协会], and New China Society [新中国学社]. Human Rights in China participated over the years in commemoration events in Hong Kong, Europe, and North America.

## → Who is Ding Zilin?

In 1989, Ding Zilin (丁子霖) was a professor of philosophy at People's University. Her 17-year-old son, Jiang Jielian (蒋捷连), was one of the first killed when the army cleared Tiananmen Square. In August 1989, she met another bereaved mother, and formed a network with some 150 other families who had lost children in the crackdown. This group became known as the Tiananmen Mothers. Professor Ding is now the spokesperson for the group. She has been interrogated, persecuted, threatened, detained and subject to frequent house arrest.

## → Who are the Tiananmen Mothers?

The Tiananmen Mothers are a rights defense group that has worked to challenge the official accounts of June 3–4, 1989, to document the deaths and those individuals still imprisoned, and present demands for full investigation, accountability, compensation, and dialogue with the authorities. Members of the group have been persecuted by the government, and their pleas for a reassessment of the 1989 events have been met with silence.

## → Will any Olympic events take place on Tiananmen Square?

China has already used the square as a symbolic backdrop during preparations for the Games. It held a controlled ceremony there, in front of invited guests, on March 31, 2008, to send the Olympic torch on a 130-day journey around the world. Another ceremony will be held on the square when the torch arrives back in Beijing at the end of the relay. Tiananmen Square will be the last leg of the relay before the torch enters the National Stadium. It will also be the starting point for the Games' marathon event. No live coverage of Tiananmen Square will be allowed during the Olympics, the Associated Press reported in March 2008.

## → Why is June Fourth important today?

Past human rights abuses are not erased by the passage of time. Nineteen years later, family members still remember and mourn their missing and dead loved ones. June Fourth remains a painful injustice for the victims and their families when the Chinese authorities fail to respond to their repeated calls for official accountability, reassessment, compensation, and most recently for dialogue. June Fourth also remains a societal wound that must be healed before a truly harmonious society and a rule of law can be built. Dr. Jiang Yanyong, a People's Liberation Army surgeon, asks in an open letter: "Who among us does not have parents, children, brothers and sisters? Who would have an innocent family member killed and not voice the same demand?"

## → What can YOU do?

**Support the Tiananmen Mothers**, and sign the *Fill the Square* petition at <http://www.fillthesquare.org>.

**Learn more** about the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown at HRIC's website.

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