

INTRODUCTION

As the 100-day countdown proceeds toward the opening of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, the Chinese authorities continue a hard-line freedom of expression crackdown on journalists, lawyers, independent intellectuals, and other rights activists. Under the full glare of an international spotlight, Chinese nationalism at home and abroad, domestic and international human rights activism, and core Olympics Movement values such as human dignity, are being advanced and challenged. What was to have been the big 2008 Olympics coming-out party has been marred by high profile domestic and international human rights criticisms and concerns about China’s policies and actions. Despite the billions of dollars spent to build the impressive Olympics venues and infrastructure (complete with state-of-the-art security systems), and to mount extensive public relations campaigns, the last two months before the opening of the Games may not run smoothly. Past human rights abuses must be addressed before China can move toward a truly “harmonious society” and the “One World, One Dream” vision of the 2008 Olympics slogan.

The past matters for the future.

June 4, 2008, marks the 19th anniversary of the Chinese government’s violent crackdown on student, democracy, and worker activists in Tiananmen Square. Nineteen years later, the Chinese government has yet to respond to the numerous domestic calls, by the Tiananmen Mothers and others, for full investigation and official accountability, compensation for victims and their families, and reassessment of the 1989 Democracy Movement and crackdown. Nineteen years later, the total number of deaths, as well as the total number of individuals imprisoned or still in prison for June Fourth-related activities, is unknown. Only nineteen years later, there is now an entire generation of young Chinese that do not know or believe that a violent crackdown even occurred.

This dangerous historical amnesia about June Fourth is the product of the Chinese authorities’ censorship and ideological control of what can be known about the past, about history. Chinese authorities have harassed, censored, prosecuted, or imprisoned Chinese activists who document, investigate, or disseminate any information the authorities deem sensitive or a threat to political control. Yet, the Tiananmen Mothers and others continue their persistent and courageous work to preserve and compile evidence for a future accounting.

This special issue of the *China Rights Forum* is a modest effort to support domestic Chinese voices and efforts to keep the truth alive, and to encourage the international community to take action. This CRF June Fourth background and resource issue includes: a timeline of events of the 1989 Democracy Movement, personal accounts of and poetry related to the Tiananmen crackdown, excerpts from Chinese citizens’ open letters calling for official accountability, and a resource list of print and multimedia information and sources. Finally, this issue’s Take Action focuses on the Chinese government, and the actions it (and the international community) can take to support domestic voices for social justice and reforms.

As significant Chinese historical markers, *fengwu fengshi* (逢五逢十) are moments for refusing historical amnesia, healing the wounds of the past, and building social justice in the present. June 4, 2008, can be reclaimed with hope as the 19th anniversary foundation for the road to 2009.



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