

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Freedom of Expression in Hong Kong?

Sydney PEN Joins International Organisations in Call for Freedom of Expression in China

Groups Condemn HK Government's Denial of Writers and Artists' Entry to Hong Kong

HONG KONG 30 April 2008: In the run up to the 100-day countdown of the Beijing Olympics, internationally renowned writers and artists, who planned to come to Hong Kong to attend peaceful activities have been denied entry by Hong Kong government.

They include: Zhang Yu, Coordinator, Writers in Prison Committee, Independent Chinese PEN Centre; Jens Galschiot, Danish artist, and two of his colleagues. They were invited by Hong Kong groups for the One Dream: Free Expression in China event, which includes a two-day seminar, and an arts fair.

As the final 100-day countdown to the Beijing Olympics begins, prominent international freedom of expression groups* have gathered in Hong Kong for a history-making mission: to send a clear message to the Chinese government: Make the Freedom of Expression Dream a Reality in China.

"Freedom of expression in Hong Kong has empowered it to play an important role in pushing the evolution of China," says Yu Ying-shih, a world-renowned historian, in remarks celebrating the opening of the seminar on freedom of expression in China and Hong Kong. "However, with the Hong Kong government's overreaction and censorship, we are very worried the crackdown is being extended to Hong Kong, and China has no sincerity to realize its promises."

"Our events coincide with the Olympic torch relay's arrival in Hong Kong, but we have no activity planned in protesting the relay," says Chip Rolley, a member of Sydney PEN and creator of the International PEN Poem Relay (www.penpoemrelay.org), in Hong Kong for the seminar. "We will be in a conference room discussing freedom of expression in China while the torch relay proceeds through the streets of Hong Kong. Our colleague Zhang Yu has been denied entry to Hong Kong to participate in a seminar."

"We have come to Hong Kong to call upon China to fulfill its guarantee to open media access on the mainland, and now we must be certain to include freedom of expression in Hong Kong. Freedom of expression is a basic human right," said Joanne Leedom-Ackerman, Vice President of the International PEN.

The Chinese government is urged to honour its pledge when it made its bid for the Beijing Olympics in 2001. It is China's obligation to ensure that freedom of expression in China is no longer just a dream.

This appeal is made against a background of the worsening situation for freedom of expression in China. There are currently at least 39 people in China imprisoned for their writing. These include Han Chinese, as well as Tibetans and Uyghurs. We call for their release.

Co-organizers: Hong Kong Journalist Association, Foreign Correspondent Club China, Independent Chinese PEN Centre, International Federation of Journalists, Reporters Sans Frontières, Hong Kong Chinese Pen Centre, Sydney PEN Centre, World Association of Newspapers. Sponsors: Laogai Foundation, International Federation of Journalists, International Freedom of Expression Exchange, China Human Rights Lawyers Concern Group, Foundation for China's Democratic Movement, The Student Union of the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Despite new regulations promulgated last year to ease the stringent restrictions on news coverage on the Mainland, reporters continue to be deterred from exercising their rights. Telephone connections to reporters' sources have either been disconnected or the sources have been intimidated. There have been restrictions on travel and movement, as well as physical harassment.

Despite the current setback, the four days of activity will proceed as planned.

May 1-2: Seminar on Freedom of Expression

May 3: Arts fair, Bus tour and Submission of letter to the Liaison Office of the Chinese Central Government in Hong Kong.

Available for Interview:

Chip Rolley

Mobile: 0415 615 489 (+61 415 615 489)

For additional information please contact Ms. Mak Yin-ting (HKJA): 25910692

makyinting@hotmail.com

Or Ms. Chine Chan (Event information desk) 69324600

yc.chine@gmail.com

You can also visit HKJA website for further details: www.hkja.org.hk