



International
Federation
of Journalists
國際記者聯會

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IFJ Press Freedom in China Campaign

August 8 Bulletin:

The Beijing Olympic Games Begin

To IFJ Asia-Pacific affiliates and friends,

Welcome to IFJ Asia-Pacific's monthly Press Freedom in China Campaign e-bulletin. This bulletin marks the opening of the Beijing Olympic Games. The next bulletin will be sent on **September 8, 2008** and contributions are most welcome.

To contribute news or information, email ifj@ifj-asia.org. To visit the IFJ's China Campaign page, go to www.ifj.org. The IFJ has also cooperated to set up a special Olympic Games site at www.playthegameforopenjournalism.org, with information and news for journalists covering the Games.

Please distribute this bulletin widely among colleagues in the media.

In this bulletin:

- 1. Journalists Beaten and Barred from Reporting in Xinjiang**
 - 2. Hong Kong Journalists Bear Brunt of Restrictions in Beijing**
 - 3. Games Open Amidst Restrictions on Media**
 - 4. Foreign Correspondents' Club of China Logs Increase in Attacks**
 - 5. New Tang Dynasty TV Signal to China Still Down**
 - 6. More Dissident Writers Jailed**
 - 7. Taiwan Security Officials Monitor Chinese Journalists**
 - 8. Safety Concerns for Mainland Journalists**
 - 9. Retired Soldier Charged for Criticising Government via Online Messaging**
 - 10. Press Regulation Head Says More Freedom to Come in China**
- Special supplement: Interview with Foreign Correspondents' Club of China's Jonathan Watts*

1. Journalists Beaten and Barred from Reporting in Xinjiang

Two Japanese journalists were beaten by police on the evening of August 4 while trying to report on the aftermath of an attack that day in Kashgar, in north-west China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region which killed at least 16 police officers. The journalists, Masami Kawakita, 38, of *Chunichi Shumbun* and Shinji Katsuta, 37, of Nippon Television Network, suffered injuries after being detained by police and barred from reporting on the attack. Two journalists from Hong Kong's ATV told the IFJ they were also detained and their footage was confiscated, and police also reportedly forced an Agence France Presse photographer to delete images taken in the vicinity of the hotel. On July 30, two Agence France Presse journalists had reportedly been denied access to Shangkumuli village, Xinjiang, where a mosque was being demolished by local authorities. Police reportedly told the journalists the area was closed without giving any further explanation, despite



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the Reporting Regulations issued in 2007 granting foreign journalists free access to report in China.

2. Hong Kong Journalists Bear Brunt of Restrictions in Beijing

Hong Kong journalists faced a series of attacks when attempting to report on the lead-up to the Olympic Games. Norman Choy, reporter for Hong Kong's *Apple Daily*, was refused entry to Beijing by immigration personnel on July 1 when he attempted to travel from Hong Kong to report on preparations for the Games. Immigration officials reportedly cited "national security laws" but refused to give details as to why he had been barred. Choy was finally allowed to enter Beijing on July 14 after an international outcry. Another Hong Kong journalist, Chen Yang of *Ming Pao* newspaper, had his camera confiscated by police on July 11 when covering a protest by disgruntled investors.

Cameraman C.M.Yeung of Hong Kong-based Now TV was attacked by a number of people while filming an argument among people queuing to buy tickets for Olympic events on 24 July. A group of uniformed police in the area refused to intervene to assist the reporters instead manhandled the cameraman when he filmed them. Journalist F.C.Law of Hong Kong's Cable News TV was reportedly grabbed by police and pushed to the ground on July 25, suffering bruising to his neck. Felix Wong, a photographer for the South China Morning Post was detained by police on the same day when a scuffle broke out after police told media personnel that they had strayed outside the permitted reporting zone. Another cameraman from TVB reported that part of his equipment was damaged by police while he was filming the scuffle, and a Danish TV reporter and his Chinese assistant were also caught up in the melee. And another two journalists of RTHK also harassed by the police in Beijing Chongwen District on July 30 after the police discovered they were filming a citizen appealing against the government's acquisition of his land in the appeals department of Chongwen District People's Government.

3. Games Open Amidst Restrictions on Media

Although China's authorities promised unfettered access to the internet in the Main Press Center, many journalists initially found themselves unable to access websites including the BBC, Amnesty International, Falun Gong, and sites about Tibet or dissidents. The IFJ demanded that the Chinese government honour their earlier promises, while the chairperson of Foreign Correspondents' Club of China issued an open letter to the President of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) asking for the detail of any agreement reached between the IOC and Chinese authorities to accept blocking of sensitive websites. After extensive international coverage of the blocks, many websites were made accessible to journalists in Beijing - however internet bans for the majority of the population remained in place. The Central Propaganda Department meanwhile issued new directives in late July barring "negative" media coverage of issues such as land disputes during the Games, and reminding websites not to publish "sensitive" information.

4. Foreign Correspondents' Club of China Logs Increase in Attacks

The Foreign Correspondents' Club of China (FCCC) has reported more than 270 cases of "reporting interference" in foreign journalists' work in China since 1 January 2007, when special Regulations came into effect to free up reporting conditions. Among them, over 40 cases were recorded after the unrest in Tibet on March 2008 and more than twelve cases after the earthquake in Sichuan in May 2008. The cases include violence, destruction of journalistic materials, detention,



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harassment of sources and staff, and interception of communications. [See the special supplement below for an interview with FCCC President Jonathan Watts.]

5. New Tang Dynasty TV Signal to China Still Down

New Tang Dynasty Television (NTDTV) continues to be blocked from transmitting into China after European satellite company Eutelsat ceased transmitting the NTDTV signal. Eutelsat cut transmissions via its W5 satellite on June 16, effectively stopping Chinese viewers from watching the privately-owned broadcaster. In 2005 Eutelsat was forced to reverse a similar decision to cut NTDTV, widely interpreted as a sop to the Chinese government, after international pressure. NTDTV is continuing to broadcast in the rest of the world and on the internet, but is lobbying for Eutelsat to reverse the decision and recommence transmission into China.

6. More Dissident Writers Jailed

Dissident writer Du Daobin, was sentenced to twenty-nine months' imprisonment after being detained on July 21 for allegedly publishing articles during a four year probation period issued in 2004. Du, 43, the former editor of *Human Rights Poetry*, was sentenced in 2004 to three years' jail for "inciting subversion of state power" for publishing 26 articles in 2004 that were critical of the Government. The sentence was suspended to four years' probation with two years' deprivation of political rights.

Also in July, the founder of 64tianwang, Huang Qi, was reportedly denied any opportunity to meet with his defense lawyer. Huang was detained on June 10 by the security bureau in Chengdu for allegedly "illegally obtaining state secrets". Huang had posted three articles by Zheng Hongling criticising authorities' handling of the May earthquake in Sichuan province. Zheng herself was charged on 9th June for writing the articles in question.

7. Taiwan Security Officials Monitor Chinese journalists

Chinese journalists visiting Taiwan also found themselves subject to surveillance and restrictions in July. According to reports, journalists including reporters from *Ming Pao* found themselves under surveillance from Taiwan security officials after taking the first direct flight from Beijing to Taipei on July 4. Police reportedly confirmed that they had followed Chinese journalists for their entire trip. Several subjects interviewed by the journalists were subsequently questioned by police, including hotel staff who were quizzed about the journalists' movement. Reports suggest that the intent was to establish whether further visits by Chinese journalists were viable.

8. Safety Concerns for Mainland Journalists

Three journalists were allegedly injured by shotgun fire on July 17 when police in Nanchong, Sichuan province, were showing off a number of guns seized from the public. Su Ding from *Nanchong City Daily*, Wang Xiaofeng of website www.newssc.org, and Zhang Yicheng from *Nanchong Ri Bao* were injured. One of Su's colleagues told the IFJ that he believed the three were accidentally injured while police were handling the shotguns for press photos. Police have provided no clear explanation as to how the accident happened.



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9. Retired Soldier Charged for Criticising Government via Online Messaging

Reports emerged in July that He Zhongyi, a retired soldier, was held for 10 days' "administrative detention" in Dongxing, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, from March 10 2008. He was charged after he expressed his opinion about government policy towards retired soldiers via QQ, a popular messaging service, and called for other to do the same. He's lawyer told the IFJ that merely expressing an opinion on the internet could not form a sustainable conviction. He Zhongyi appealed the charge on July 10 and the appeal court is considering its decision.

10. Press Regulation Head Says More Freedom to Come in China

Liu Binjie, Director of China's General Administration of Press and Publications (GAPP), said on 31 July that the freedom of the press promised in the special Regulations on reporting the Olympic Games is not a "short term policy" and would continue after the Games. GAPP administers Chinese government regulation of all print publishing. "Although the promise will end in October [under current regulations], Chinese journalism will not stop, it will progress in a more transparent and fair direction. We have that ability and confidence," Liu told Xinhua News Agency, the official news organ of the Chinese government.

Special supplement: Interview with Foreign Correspondents' Club of China's Jonathan Watts

To mark the opening of the Beijing Olympic Games, the IFJ interviewed the President of the Foreign Correspondents' Club of China, Jonathan Watts. Watts is the East Asia Correspondent for The Guardian (UK), and spoke to the IFJ on August 5 in Beijing about the problems with the special Olympic Games Reporting Regulations for Foreign Journalists and the atmosphere for journalists around the Games.

Watts began by saying that despite the Regulations, introduced on January 1, 2007, the biggest challenge is the need to change the way people in China think - especially the police and officials. Police, says Watts, should know they do not have the right to stop reporters just because they don't like their reports.

Watts says that although the Chinese constitution guarantees freedom of expression and the reporting regulations allow citizens to speak to the media, there have been a number of cases similar to Hu Jia, who was jailed on April 3, 2008 for accepting interviews with foreign media and contributing articles to foreign news websites about health and human rights issues in China.

"Why should talking to the media be a crime?" Watts sighs.

The FCCC says it has received more than 270 reports of interference since January 1, 2007, when the new regulations came into force. Watts says he is disappointed with the number of cases, which is much higher than expected.

Although Watts himself has not been detained since the new regulations were introduced, he says he hasn't been immune from harassment or interference.

"The authorities can stop journalists from reporting just because they don't like the news," he says.



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“The authorities fear the media, especially foreign media, because they can’t easily control us. Once we collect information there is nothing they can do, so they are trying to stop us collecting that information in the first place.”

Watts says the example of recent clashes between Beijing police and Hong Kong media show that a shift in attitudes is required. He says that Chinese police had been ordered neither to touch foreign journalists’ equipment nor use their hands to cover the front of cameras – but the order didn’t mention Hong Kong or Taiwan media.

Under China’s promises, says Watts, journalists had expected that they would be able to do their job in China - but the reality has not been so simple. During the unrest in Tibet in March 2008, foreign media were not allowed free access except by pre-arrangement with the Chinese government. And after the Sichuan earthquake in May 2008, foreign media had relatively free access for roughly the first two weeks but later found the controls snapping back to ‘normal’ setting, with strict limits on their movement.

One tool used to limit media access in both cases was the suggestion from authorities that journalists’ safety was at risk. Watts says that the safety issue is a decision for the media, not the authorities, and that the argument was being used as an excuse to prevent coverage.

“It’s rubbish, just nonsense. Safety is just a pathetic excuse,” Watts says.

Citing the Sichuan earthquake as an example, he says that the most dangerous times were in fact those first two weeks, during which there were many aftershocks and before buildings had been secured. Police allowed journalists to move and report freely, and only clamped down when the media began to follow the “sensitive” story of grieving parents who were furious about collapsed school buildings.

Finally, Watts says foreign journalists in China must remember two things: one, be careful not to breach Chinese law; and two, if detained, stay calm and use your skills to record everything that happens. After the Games, he hopes the regulations will be prolonged and extended to bar any interference with interviewees.

If you have information on a press freedom violation or matters relating to media freedom and journalists’ rights in China, contact staff at IFJ Asia-Pacific so that action can be taken. To contribute to this bulletin, email ifjchina@ifj-asia.org.

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