

URGENT ACTION

PEACEFUL PROTESTERS TARGETED IN INNER MONGOLIA

At least 23 individuals have reportedly been arrested for “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” for participating in, or sharing information about, peaceful protests against a recent “bilingual education policy” in northern China’s Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. On 2 September 2020, police in the Horqin District of Tongliao City published the names of 129 individuals suspected of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble”. The authorities have yet to release information about the whereabouts of arrested individuals. No person should be arrested solely for exercising rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Director Heng Xiaofan

Public Security Department of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region
No. 15, Hailaerdong Lu,
Xincheng Qu, Huhhot
010020, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region
People’s Republic of China

Dear Director Heng:

I am writing to express my concern about the ongoing crackdown against peaceful protesters in Inner Mongolia that began in early September 2020.

According to media reports, at least 23 individuals, including pregnant women and middle school students, have been arrested so far for “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” after participating in or sharing information about peaceful protests against the recent “bilingual education policy”.

On 2 September 2020, the Horqin District Branch of the Tongliao City Public Security Bureau released the names and photos of 129 individuals wanted for “picking quarrels and provoking trouble”.

No one should be arrested or prosecuted for taking part in a peaceful protest or sharing information about a protest. Such measures violate the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly under international human rights law and standards.

Furthermore, I find it extremely distressing that no information about the whereabouts of the arrested individuals has yet been made public. I am deeply concerned about their wellbeing and fear that they are at risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

I therefore call on you to:

- **Release peaceful protesters immediately and unconditionally unless there is sufficient credible and admissible evidence that they have committed an internationally recognized offence and are granted a fair trial in line with international standards;**
- **Refrain from further arrest and prosecutions of individuals who have simply exercised their right to peaceful assembly.**

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Protests arose in September 2020 in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (Inner Mongolia) in response to a new “bilingual education policy” that would gradually change the teaching medium of several different classes from Mongolian to Mandarin Chinese throughout the nine years of compulsory schooling. The new policy started with the “language and literature” curriculum on 1 September 2020. If the proposed plan goes according to schedule, from 2022 students in Inner Mongolia will be taking classes in language, history and politics solely in Chinese on the basis of the Chinese state-compiled textbooks. Protesters are worried that the new policy will eventually diminish Mongolian culture and language in Inner Mongolia.

Although nearly 80% of the population in Inner Mongolia is Han Chinese, Inner Mongolia is also the home to 4.2 million ethnic Mongols, nearly 70% of China’s total ethnic Mongol population.

As Chinese authorities rigorously censor all media, from print media to online media, it is difficult for protesters to share any information to document the protests. It is also not uncommon for foreign journalists in China to have restrictions when they are covering news in China. A Los Angeles Times reporter who visited a Mongolian-language school in the Inner Mongolian capital Hohhot during the protests reported being surrounded by plainclothes men who then took her to the back building of a police station. She was interrogated and separated from her belongings despite identifying herself as an accredited journalist. After more than four hours of detention, she was then forced to leave the region.

Numerous media reports say that several local government officials, teachers and Communist Party members were punished for failing to carry out the new “bilingual education policy” in Inner Mongolia. On 16 September, the local authorities in Xilinhot notified students and their parents that they would be punished if students failed to complete their school enrolment on time, including being deprived of government subsidies and withdrawal of bank loans.

The crime of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” (寻衅滋事罪) under Article 293 of the Chinese Criminal Law is a broadly defined and vaguely worded offence that has been widely used to target activists and human rights defenders. Although the crime originally applied to acts that disrupted order in public places, but since 2013 the scope has expanded to include online space as well. Anyone convicted could face a maximum of five years in prison.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: [Chinese, English]

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 21 November 2020

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Group (they/them)

And copies to:

His Excellency Mr Liu Xiaoming
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