

Chinese Official Rules Out an Amnesty for Political Prisoners

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A top Chinese official appeared today to rule out the possibility of an amnesty for political prisoners this year, and human rights advocates from Hong Kong said customs officials had seized a petition supporting the amnesty signed by 24,000 people from 30 countries.

The petition was the most important sign so far of international support for the campaign that has emerged here in the last few months for the release of political prisoners like Wei Jingsheng, a democracy advocate whose 10th anniversary in prison today was marked in virtual silence.

The seven rights campaigners from Hong Kong, including teachers and clerics, were also barred today from presenting a copy of the petition directly to the National People's Congress, China's legislature, which is now meeting in its annual session. They were only able to leave a copy at the front gate. Series of Petitions

The group members said the original pages of the petitions were seized as "propaganda material" by customs officials on Tuesday when the group arrived at the airport in the nearby city of Tianjin. The group was able to have a copy sent to Beijing by facsimile.

Most of the signatures were from Hong Kong, but organizers said that intellectuals from Taiwan, the United States, Japan and Europe also signed. The

petition is the latest in a series calling for the release of China's political prisoners. Hans Lutz, one of the seven campaigners, said the signatures were gathered over six weeks and mostly represented professors, teachers, students and workers.

Wang Hanbin, vice chairman of the National People's Congress standing committee, told reporters today that the Congress "is not considering giving, nor does it think necessary to offer, special pardons to prisoners."

"I don't think there is the need now," Mr. Wang said. In October, China will mark the 40th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, and some intellectuals have called on the Government to commemorate the anniversary by releasing political prisoners. 'Transcends National Boundaries'

In the last month, China has repeatedly maintained that it does not have political prisoners, asserting that Wei Jingsheng and others were jailed for crimes against the Communist revolution.

"China says this is an internal matter, but I don't accept that," said Emily Lau, a journalist based in Hong Kong who helped carry the petitions to Beijing. "The question of human rights transcends national boundaries."

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