



ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS
REPRESENTATIVE CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, CHAIR
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January 31, 2024

The Honorable Astrid Söderbergh Widding
Chair
Nobel Peace Prize Committee
Henrik Ibsen Gate 51, NO-0255
Oslo, Norway

Dear Chair Widding and Members of the Nobel Peace Prize Committee:

We, the undersigned members of the United States Congress, respectfully nominate human rights lawyers **Ding Jiayi** and **Xu Zhiyong**, Uyghur scholar **Ilham Tohti**, and entrepreneur and democracy advocate **Jimmy Lai** to receive the 2024 Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of their deep commitment to human rights and peace in China. All four are arbitrarily detained, serving long sentences for exercising rights guaranteed them by international law.

We appreciate the Committee's attention to the situation in highly repressed societies, as represented by the awarding of the Peace Prize to laureates in Russia, Belarus, and Iran. The government of the People's Republic of China is among the worst violators of human rights in today's world. The last award given to a person in China was to Liu Xiaobo in 2009, one of only two Nobel laureates who have died in state custody.

The human rights record of the PRC recently underwent scrutiny during the Universal Periodic Review process at the United Nations. States and stakeholders submitted information regarding genocide and crimes against humanity in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR); the often brutal dismantling of networks of human rights lawyers seeking legal and political reforms in China; and the imposition of a National Security Law in Hong Kong that has led to the unjust detention of over 1,000 people--only Belarus and Burma (Myanmar) have jailed more political prisoners over the past four years.

Awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to these four individuals would send a signal that the desire for peace and freedom of those living under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party is no different than that expressed by billions of other people around the world.

Xu Zhiyong and Ding Jiayi

Xu Zhiyong and Ding Jiayi have spent decades at the forefront of the struggle for legal reform and government transparency and accountability in China. Their efforts date back to the beginnings of the "rights defense" movement, and their experiences illustrate the tenacity and dedication that are central to

the cause. In 2003, pioneering legal scholar Xu Zhiyong joined other advocates in calling on the National People's Congress to abolish the abusive "custody and repatriation" system. That same year, Xu cofounded the Open Constitution Initiative, a nongovernmental organization advocating rule of law reforms that was ultimately shut down by PRC authorities in 2009. He was elected as an independent local people's congress deputy in Beijing municipality. In 2011, commercial lawyer Ding Jiayi began to work with the China Citizens Movement (previously known as the New Citizens' Movement), a broad network of individuals promoting legal and political reforms, human rights, and social justice, also cofounded by Xu and other rights advocates.

In December 2019, public security officials from Shandong province took Ding Jiayi into custody in Beijing in connection with a December 2019 gathering held in Xiamen municipality, Fujian province, where participants discussed Chinese politics and civil society. Xu Zhiyong evaded police for 50 days, during which time he criticized the Chinese government's handling of the COVID-19 outbreak and urged Xi Jinping to step down, until he was detained in February 2020. Authorities placed both men under "residential surveillance at a designated location," a form of secret detention, and formally arrested them in June 2020 on suspicion of "inciting subversion of state power." Both Xu and Ding have alleged that authorities subjected them to prolonged interrogation and other forms of abuse; Xu said that interrogators bound his limbs to a "tiger chair" during prolonged interrogation sessions, and Ding was reportedly denied adequate food and sleep. In June 2022, a court in Linyi municipality, Shandong province, tried Ding and Xu on the more serious charge of "subversion of state power," sentencing them in April 2023 to, respectively, 12 and 14 years in prison. Both Ding and Xu were previously imprisoned in 2014 following their advocacy for access to equal education for the children of migrant workers.

Ilham Tohti

The work of Uyghur scholar Ilham Tohti embodies the peaceful struggle for human rights and the rule of law in China, and his work is even more relevant in light of the atrocity crimes committed by Chinese authorities in recent years in the XUAR. As a professor at Minzu University in Beijing, Tohti courageously voiced concern about government policies toward Uyghurs and other ethnic groups in the XUAR, calling upon authorities to fully abide by existing laws on ethnic autonomy and reduce economic discrimination against ethnic minority groups. He was also committed to promoting inter-ethnic dialogue, including through Uyghur Online, the website he founded. In 2014, Tohti was detained at his home in Beijing and formally charged with "separatism." Later that year, he was sentenced to life in prison in a trial marred by egregious procedural violations. Even after being sentenced to life in prison, he issued a statement through his lawyer that "peace is a heavenly gift to the Uyghur and Han people. Only peace and good will can create a common interest." In the years since his trial, authorities have subjected him to periods of solitary confinement and to restricted visits from his family.

Jimmy Lai

In 2020, Hong Kong police took Jimmy Chee-ying Lai into custody on suspicion of "collusion with a foreign country or with external elements to endanger national security" under Hong Kong's National Security Law (NSL) and "conspiracy to defraud." Lai is the founder of the now-defunct pro-democracy newspaper Apple Daily, which exposed government officials' misconduct and was often critical of government policies. Lai was formally charged under the NSL and, in a trial that started in December 2023, faces additional charges that could lead to life imprisonment. Since his detention the Hong Kong government has destroyed press

freedom, and all independent news outlets have closed, either a chilling effect of Lai's detention or a result of direct government suppression.

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All these individuals embody the spirit of the Nobel Peace Prize and justly deserve the award. The Peace Prize will focus the world's attention on all those struggling to exercise their fundamental human rights in the People's Republic of China.

We believe that someday all those we nominated will be honored for their peaceful efforts to advance freedom and human dignity in China and Hong Kong. We urge the Committee to recognize their contributions to building a more peaceful world, where rights and freedoms will be respected.

Sincerely,



Representative Christopher H. Smith
Chair



Senator Jeffrey A. Merkley
Cochair