

**Statement By Christine Shea,
Coordinator of Amnesty International Group 284,
Open Forum on Human Rights in China
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Coordinator of Amnesty International Group 284
Annapolis, Maryland

Amnesty International Group 284 has been working on the case of an Inner Mongolian citizen named Tegexi since 1997. Tegexi is 36 years old and has a wife and son. Prior to his arrest, he was employed at the Inner Mongolian Bureau of Foreign Affairs. He has a Master's Degree in Mongolian.

Tegexi was arrested on December 12, 1995. His arrest came as a result of his involvement with an organization called the Southern Mongolian Democratic Alliance. The group's aims were to promote human rights, Mongolian culture, and a high degree of autonomy for China's minority nationalities. This autonomy is guaranteed in the constitution of the People's Republic of China.

According to reports, an internal document circulated by the Chinese Communist Party identified Tegexi and other alleged members of the SMDA as "nationalist separatists" and called the SMDA a "counter-revolutionary organization that is carrying out activities aimed at splitting the nation." A number of others were arrested at about the same time as Tegexi, and protest demonstrations were held at the Mongolian Language College following these arrests. Eventually, all of those detained were released, with the exception of Tegexi and Hada, who was the proprietor of a local bookstore.

On March 9, 1996, Tegexi and Hada were formally arrested and charged with "conspiring to overthrow the government" and "espionage." They were brought to trial and sentenced on December 9, 1996. Tegexi was sentenced to ten years in prison and Hada to fifteen years imprisonment.

Amnesty International considers Tegexi to be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely because of the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression and association. He has not used or advocated violence. Following Tegexi's arrest and sentencing, Amnesty International researchers investigated his case. Once they had determined that he was a victim of human rights abuses and that he had not used or advocated violence, local groups were asked to "adopt" his case. Group 284 agreed to work on Tegexi's behalf. Local groups in the Netherlands, Germany, and Portugal have also adopted Tegexi's case.

As an Amnesty International group, our concern is not based on Tegexi's beliefs or political affiliation. We believe that Tegexi, like everyone else, has the right to peacefully express his beliefs and to associate with others who share his beliefs. The primary tool that we use in advocating for Tegexi is the personal letter. Our group has written hundreds of letters to various government officials since 1997. Each letter states that Tegexi is imprisoned for the peaceful exercise of his basic human rights and asks that he be released from prison immediately and unconditionally. Although each letter is unique, these two core ideas are always included.

Our work on Tegexi's behalf has several facets. During our monthly meeting, each member of the group writes at least one letter on Tegexi's behalf. A typical meeting may be attended by between five and ten people. The group's quarterly newsletter also includes information on Tegexi's situation and readers are asked to write a letter. The mailing list includes approximately 100 people. Finally, the group occasionally

sponsors special events, such as an annual Write-a-Thon. Tegexi's case is included in letter writing actions during these events also.

The case coordinator is the one who decides how letter writing will be targeted. Amnesty International provides case coordinators with a support network of country experts. In addition, e-mail information and occasional updates from the London office help the coordinator to develop a strategy for each case. In our work on Tegexi's case, we have written to both local and national Chinese government officials. We have also written to our elected representatives and officials at the United States Department of State.

Letter writing to Chinese government officials is coordinated, so that one or two officials are targeted each month. On the national level, we have written to President Jiang Zemin on several occasions. We have also written to other national officials such as the Vice President, the Premier, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Minister of Justice. If possible, copies of letters are sent to the Chinese Ambassador in Washington, D.C. and we have written directly to the Ambassador.

On the local level we have sent letters to the Chairwoman of the Government of the Inner Mongolian Region, the Secretary of the Party Committee in Inner Mongolia, and the Chief Procurator of the Inner Mongolian Region. In addition, we've written to prison officials, such as the Director of the Regional Bureau of the Reform-Through-Labor Administration, and the directors of the prisons where Tegexi has been detained.

Unfortunately, we have never received a reply to any of our letters to Chinese officials. However, prisoners who have been released from Chinese prisons have reported that letters to officials did seem to have an impact. One former prisoner, Wei Jingsheng, said that he believed that the letters sent by Amnesty International groups affected his treatment in prison. He also said that although he never saw these letters, he did learn of their existence and that "the mental inspiration this gave me greatly surpassed any small improvement in my living conditions."

Another facet of our work on Tegexi's behalf has involved requests for assistance from United States government officials and elected representatives. Our group sent letters and e-mails to Presidents Clinton and Bush concerning Tegexi. These letters preceded presidential visits to China. We also wrote to Secretary of State Albright before she traveled to China. In each of these letters, we requested that Tegexi's case be brought up during discussions with Chinese officials.

We have received replies from the White House and from the State Department. In February 2001, Christopher Sibilla, from State Department Office of Bilateral Affairs, wrote that they "have been following closely the case of Tegexi," and that the State Department "views this case as a source of continuing concern." However, we do not know if President Clinton, President Bush, or Secretary Albright discussed Tegexi's case with Chinese officials.

Group 284 also wrote to our elected representatives asking them to adopt Tegexi and write letters on his behalf. We have written to Senators Paul Sarbanes and Barbara Mikulski, and Representatives Wayne Gilchrest and Steny Hoyer. We received replies from the offices of the elected officials, and although they were sympathetic to Tegexi's case, none were willing to write letters on his behalf. Senator Sarbanes forwarded our letter to the State Department, as did Senator Mikulski. Senator Mikulski also sent a copy of our letter to the Chinese Ambassador.

During the past year, we have sent occasional letters and cards to Tegexi in prison. We have never received a reply and we do not know if he receives the letters. We send simple messages of hope and support. Our hope is that, even if the letters are not delivered to Tegexi, they will let prison officials know that he has not been forgotten.

This message, that Tegexi has not been forgotten, is the essence of our work. Despite the unresponsiveness of Chinese officials, Group 284 has continued to write to them consistently for the past five years. We hope that our work will help Tegexi to be released, but we also hope that the consistent pressure will prevent others from suffering as Tegexi has suffered.