



“To empower the citizens of China by sowing the seeds of hope and giving voice to their struggles for a peaceful transition to a democratic China.”

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LIU XIA’S REPRESENTATIVE TO NOBEL COMMITTEE DEPLORES UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS REJECTION OF INVITATION TO ATTEND NOBEL CEREMONY

The decision is part of a recent pattern of United Nations bowing to Chinese pressure on human-rights concerns

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Statement of Dr. Yang Jianli

I have the honor and responsibility of serving as Liu Xia’s representative to the Norwegian Nobel Committee, which this year selected her imprisoned husband, Liu Xiaobo, as its recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize.

Many weeks ago, Navanethem Pillay, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights was extended an invitation on behalf of Liu Xiaobo and Liu Xia to attend the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize Ceremony. Ms. Pillay did not respond to this invitation. Instead, we learned from the media on 3 December that Rupert Colville, her spokesperson, publicly rejected this private invitation that had been offered to her.

Ms. Pillay’s decision is a clear and unequivocal abdication of her responsibilities as High Commissioner, which I believe resulted from direct pressure from the Chinese government. It is especially concerning because it occurs in the wake of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s refusal to raise Dr. Liu’s case when he met with Chinese President Hu Jintao shortly after Dr. Liu was announced as the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate.

I call on Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and High Commissioner Navanethem Pillay to discharge the fundamental purposes of the United Nations, which include those defined under Article 1(3) of the UN Charter “as promoting and encouraging respect for human rights.” If they are unwilling or unable to do so, they should resign.

Much like Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s deflated explanation about his refusal to raise Dr. Liu’s case in meeting with President Hu Jintao that there were “many items on the agenda,” High Commissioner Pillay’s explanation of her unwillingness to come to Oslo is similarly hollow.

Her spokesman has said she is unable to attend because of a preexisting commitment and that there is no tradition of the High Commissioner attending the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony.

Ironically, the theme of this year's Human Rights Day is that of human rights defenders. Liu Xiaobo is one of the foremost human rights defenders in the world today. There will be hundreds of reporters coming to the ceremony and reporting globally about the event. Ms. Pillay's schedule is always changing – she could easily send a deputy to the event in Geneva and come to Oslo to harness the opportunity provided by the Nobel presentation to benefit all human rights defenders around the world. But the reality is she is more concerned about offending the Chinese government than discharging her duties to the United Nations. Her excuse that the High Commissioner does not regularly attend the ceremony is irrelevant. Recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize are selected on the basis of their contributions to peace, which only in a limited number of cases has meant focusing on preserving and promoting human rights. There is no better place than Oslo to be this year for Human Rights Day, especially because its theme is human rights defenders.

But what is most disturbing is this is about much more than China and its human rights record. The award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Liu Xiaobo is a direct challenge to the world's greatest illustration of a system of development which advocates that economic and political development can be completely delinked and that human rights, both domestically and internationally, can be sacrificed in the name of development. By failing to show up in Oslo, Ms. Pillay sends a message that such systems are not incompatible with the UN Charter and major human rights treaties. It is incumbent on the United Nations to make clear that no country can flagrantly violate civil and political rights in the name of promoting economic and social rights.

I know firsthand what it is like to be imprisoned like Liu Xiaobo. I spent five years in prison in China. For the first 14 months, I was held *incommunicado*, in solitary confinement, without access to any reading materials, and interrogated over 100 times. It was a decision of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention that resulted in my finally being given access to my domestic lawyer. And I was later honored to be visited while imprisoned by the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture. Knowing the United Nations stood firmly with me and my fellow political prisoners gave us great hope and confidence that the world had not forgotten us.

The message that Secretary-General Ban and High Commissioner Pillay is sending to Liu Xiaobo and the countless imprisoned dissidents in China and around the world is similarly clear, simple, and profoundly wrong – one cannot count on the United Nations because it will not be there for you.

About Dr. Yang Jianli

Dr. Yang Jianli, a Chinese citizen, is a longtime friend of Liu Xiaobo and is internationally known for his efforts promoting democracy in China. He is a Fellow at Harvard University and the Founder and President of Initiatives for China, a Boston-based organization dedicated to advancing peaceful democratic change in China. Dr. Yang spent five years as a political prisoner after returning to China in 2002 to observe labor unrest in the country. Within days of witnessing the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, he returned to the United States and

testified before the U.S. Congress about what he had seen. Dr. Yang holds a Ph.D. in mathematics from the University of California at Berkeley, and a Ph.D. in political economy from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

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