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Investigate the Persecution  
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## BBC Monitoring: China - RSF says foreign journalists still persecuted for covering Falun Gong

December 5, 2001

### BBC Monitoring

International media watchdog Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF) has asked the [Jiang Zemin's] government to stop intimidating foreign journalists attempting to report on the Falun Gong spiritual movement, which is banned in China. Since China has promised to let journalists work freely during the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, RSF Secretary-General Robert Menard said the authorities should stop arresting foreign correspondents. Before the next session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, RSF said it will appeal to the special rapporteur for free expression to denounce the Chinese authorities' attitude towards foreign journalists. Following is text of a press release in English by RSF, dated 4 December; subheadings as carried:

On 20 November 2001, Jutta Lietsch, correspondent of the German newspaper Leipziger Volkszeitung and contributor to the daily Tageszeitung, Wen-chun Fan, cameraman of the American TV channel CNN, Stefan Niemann, correspondent of the German TV channel ARD in Beijing and her assistant were detained and questioned by the police while they were covering the demonstration of 35 Western followers of the spiritual movement Falun Gong on Tiananmen Square in Beijing. The cameramen's equipment was seized. The authorities accused the three journalists of not having requested authorization for doing this report. They were released two hours later but their equipment, particularly their films, press cards and residence permits were not returned to them. Jutta Lietsch had been invited to the Foreign Ministry in the afternoon, where she was told that the authorities would not take into account their offence if the journalists did not report the events which they had witnessed. Further to the articles published in the German press, the authorities qualified the ARD correspondent as a "troublemaker" and threatened to confiscate his press card for two months, therefore preventing him from working. The authorities also seized the press card of the CNN reporter Wen-chun Fan, for two months. They may also take similar measures against Stefan Niemann.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF - Reporters sans Frontières) protested against this questioning and these threats, and the way the Chinese authorities are trying to prevent foreign journalists from reporting on Falun Gong activities.

For the past two years the Chinese authorities have harassed foreign journalists who investigate this organization criminalized by the government. On 22 July 1999, the Beijing authorities banned the spiritual movement after charging it with being a [Jiang Zemin Regime's slanderous term omitted]. In twenty-eight months, the repression launched by the authorities has caused, according to Falun Gong, the death of at least two hundred and fifty people and the arrest and detention of five hundred thousand people, for varying periods of time. Since the beginning of 1999, foreign press correspondents in China have been interested by the Falun Gong phenomenon, a movement inspired by Taoism, Buddhism and also by traditional Chinese meditation, qigong. Full attention of the media has been focused on it since the 25 April 1999 demonstration, when thousands of Falun Gong followers surrounded the central government's seat in Beijing.

Since the eradication campaign against Falun Gong was launched by the authorities, foreign journalists have systematically been hindered in their work on this topic. Foreign photographers and cameramen are prevented from working on and around Tiananmen Square where hundreds of Falun Gong followers have demonstrated for the passed years. According to Reporters Without Borders' estimations, at least 50 representatives of international media have been questioned. Some of them have been beaten by the police. The correspondents who have tried to cover the banned movement's activities have been harassed by the security services. Finally, many Falun Gong followers have been jailed for being interviewed by foreign journalists.

The police is always present around Tiananmen Square, ready to question any photographer or cameraman who may try to capture some pictures of followers peacefully demonstrating against the ban on their movement.

The testimonies obtained by RSF from foreign press correspondents are overwhelming for the Chinese authorities.

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### **Threats and tailing**

On 28 October 1999, Falun Gong managed to organize an underground press conference for some international media. A dozen journalists were present, among them foreign press agencies. The Falun Gong speakers had enough time to explain the nature of their movement and to denounce the repression to which they were subjected. The following day, world-wide media reported this press conference - a real humiliation for the Chinese security services which wanted their revenge. The Chinese police detained five correspondents of the foreign press and seized their press cards. During long interrogations, punctuated by threats, the journalists were accused of producing "illegal reports". They were forced to sign a letter in which they recognized having worked illegally. During the following months, the majority of the foreign journalists interested in Falun Gong were followed, questioned and often threatened. An American daily's correspondent remembers: "I was constantly followed. Sometimes far, sometimes near. The policemen were very aggressive. I could not even work or visit friends because I feared causing them problems. My contacts were constantly watched and it was impossible for me to meet Falun Gong members for fear of their arrest." Another journalist based in Beijing denounced these practices which still force him to "leave home by the back door, to hide in the taxi, and to check a thousand times if we are not being followed before meeting someone".

Transmitting information, particularly to foreign journalists working in Beijing, also caused several followers to be jailed. Zhan Xueling, quoted in a series of articles by Ian Johnson, the Wall Street Journal correspondent in Beijing, was arrested by the police on 24 April 2001. She was sentenced to three years in a labour camp a few weeks later. The American daily's journalist had reported in an article, awarded with the Pulitzer Prize, that the young woman accused the police of Shandong Province (east of the country) of beating to death her mother, also a Falun Gong member. Ian Johnson did not confirm that Zhan Xueling's arrest was linked to his article, but he is sure that after receiving the Pulitzer Prize for his articles about Falun Gong, the "Chinese police are likely to make my life impossible in Beijing". He is now a correspondent in Berlin.

Gu Linna, a Falun Gong member, was sentenced to four years in jail for transmitting information to foreign journalists about hundreds of members forced to undergo psychiatric internment. This former presenter of Hebei province TV channel also took part in the organization of press conferences for foreign journalists.

### **Questioning and violence**

During the last two years dozens of journalists, among them photographers and press agency cameramen, have been questioned by the police while trying to cover Falun Gong activities in Beijing. About twenty reporters of Agence France-Presse [AFP] have been arrested by the police. AFP, Reuters, AP and CNN have all been ejected from the square more or less violently or subjected to processing through police vans converted into mobile police stations. The foreign press is therefore "persona non grata" on and around Tiananmen Square.

A photographer of a foreign press agency in Beijing who is a native of China is systematically chased away from Tiananmen Square. A French reporter of a press agency, questioned in 2000 on Tiananmen Square, was deprived of his press card for more than ten days.

A photographer for a press agency reports: "For the first demonstrations we decided to be permanently present on the spot. We took turns. As soon as a Falun Gong group started a demonstration, the policemen were looking for any person with cameras or video cameras. You had to be fast to avoid the questioning. When they catch you, they first open your equipment and then take your press card. If you are lucky, it can last a few hours, or several weeks. In any case, they prevent you from working." In June 2001, Stephen Shaver, an AFP photographer, was questioned and hit by policemen during the concert of "The Three Tenors" in favour of the Beijing bid for the 2008 Olympics while he was photographing the arrest of a person by the police. As usual, the Chinese authorities charged the photographer with "illegal work".

In the same way, Teresa Bergada, journalist of the Spanish radio station Radio Catalunya, was detained and hit by the police in 2000, after taking pictures of the arrest of Falun Gong members in Beijing. The Spanish embassy had to intervene to secure the journalist's release.

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Foreign television teams which manage to take pictures of the repression against Falun Gong face another problem. The government television channel Central Television of China [CCTV], the only channel able to send pictures abroad by satellite, has blocked the broadcasting of pictures concerning Falun Gong, on order from the authorities.

### **Repression against Falun Gong**

Since 1999 Falun Gong has used modern techniques to communicate. Meetings and demonstrations have been organized through mobile phones and e-mails. Falun Gong has launched web sites and radio stations from abroad. The authorities have reacted very violently by trying to take punitive measures against those who transmit information and by preventing followers from contacting others groups abroad. For about two years the Falun Gong web sites have been banned in China and visiting them is liable to a jail sentence.

The bad treatment attributed to the security forces has caused the death of at least two Falun Gong members who took part in the diffusion or the copying of information about the group drawn from the Internet. On 27 June 2001, Li Changjun died after being tortured in police custody. He was arrested on 16 May for having downloaded and printed Internet documents about Falun Gong. According to the Information Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, based in Hong Kong, Li Changjun, 33, worked for the Wuhan tax centre, in Hubei Province (central China), and had already been arrested several times for maintaining his membership with the [group], as the authorities call it. Li Changjun's mother said that her son was covered with scars and nasty bruises, that his neck and his ears were purplish and that he was abnormally thin. On 1 August 2001, Chen Qiulan, 47, member of Falun Gong, died of a heart attack in the detention centre of Daging (province of Heilongjiang, north-east of the country). He had been arrested in July 2001 for spreading information on the Internet about the movement. Otherwise, the professor Chang was sentenced to three years in jail for having sent information to a Falun Gong radio station based abroad. He was found guilty of "diffusing state secrets". He actually reported the repression on the movement.

### **Conclusions**

These violations of press freedom are unacceptable. China's determination to prevent the foreign press from covering the activities and government repression of the Falun Gong clearly illustrates its rejection of independent news gathering. In that way, the Chinese [party's name omitted] party denies the foreign press the right to cover difference of opinion, corruption, AIDS in Henan Province, natural disasters, Tibetan and Uighur separatism and, finally, Falun Gong.

Reporters Without Borders has asked the Chinese government to stop intimidation against foreign journalists who attempt to inform international public opinion about the Falun Gong situation in China. "China committed itself vis-a-vis the international community to let journalists work freely during the 2008 Olympics in Beijing. The authorities should anticipate this generous promise and stop hindering foreign press correspondents", Robert Menard, RSF general secretary, declared. Before the next session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Reporters Without Borders will appeal to the special rapporteur for free expression to denounce the Chinese authorities' attitude towards foreign journalists.