

Catholic Commission Highlights Human Rights Abuses In China

Sunday, 17 August 2008

HONG KONG (UCAN) -- August 15, 2008 - The Justice and Peace Commission (JPC) of Hong Kong diocese has used the occasion of the Beijing Olympics to highlight China's human rights record.

Shackled in stocks, three people represent basic freedoms lost to people on the mainland -- religious freedom (left), freedom of speech (center) and press freedom (right) -- during the games day of the Hong Kong diocesan Justice and Peace Commission.

On Aug. 13, the commission demonstrated outside the Chinese government's Liaison Office here, and placed an envelope containing a statement addressed to the Chinese government on the iron railings in front of the office.

The statement urges the government to improve human rights and allow greater religious freedom in the mainland, and to honor the promises on human rights and press freedom it made when it applied to host the Games.

The statement includes a list of people detained as a result of trying to protect local residents' farmlands and houses, which Chinese officials took over for construction work relating to the Olympics, as well as human rights activists such as Hu Jia, who was sentenced to three years' imprisonment.

It also calls for the release of underground Catholic priests and bishops, including Bishop Su Zhimin of Baoding who has gone missing since October 1997, and detained Bishops Shi Enxiang of Yixian and Yao Liang of Xiwanzi.

In late July, to mark the occasion of the Aug. 8-24 Olympics in Beijing, JPC distributed 6,000 copies of China's Human Rights to local parishes and Catholic schools. The booklet highlights human rights violations such as evictions due to construction of Olympic facilities, the maltreatment of people petitioning the central government, labor rights, press and religious freedoms, use of the death sentence, and democratic development in Hong Kong.

JPC says in the booklet's preface that it hopes the Beijing Olympics will be a starting point for the improvement of human rights in the country.

Or Yan-yan, JPC's project officer, told UCA News more copies may be printed and sent to schools in early September when classes resume after the summer break. That also would coincide with the Paralympic Games for disabled athletes, set to take place Sept. 6-17 in Beijing.

At Hong Kong's St. Francis of Assisi Church on Aug. 2, JPC held a games day consisting of competitions, group sharings and faith reflections. The special day attracted about 30 participants from various parishes and Church schools.

Or said the games day activities hopefully would help trigger concern for human rights victims and the country. The games, she pointed out, were designed to reflect the plight of various vulnerable groups, including land evictees and rural migrant workers whose plight the Chinese government deliberately ignored when it spent a lot of money hosting the Olympics.

The tug-of-war game, meant to show how human rights activists are prevented from living a normal life in the country during the games day of the Hong Kong diocesan Justice and Peace Commission.

In one activity, Patrick Poon Kar-wai, a JPC member, played the role of a mainland reporter who had to tell a petitioner of the central government in Beijing he "cannot report" news about the petition.

Poon told UCA News his performance expressed the frustration of mainland reporters who want to reveal the truth but were prevented from doing so by authorities. If news reports affect the vested interest of officials, he said, the reporters could be suppressed or even convicted.

Another participant, Janet Leung, president of the Hong Kong Federation of Catholic Students, told UCA News that contestants who drew lots containing the words "human rights" were barred from taking part in the tug-of-war game. This signified that human rights activists are prevented from living a normal life in the country, she said.

A catechumen surnamed Kwok, who also joined the games, told UCA News the Beijing Olympics honor all Chinese people, but injustices linked to the event must be addressed. Otherwise, she said, "the event will remain superficial."

END

<http://www.ucanews.com/2008/08/15/catholic-commission-highlights-human-rights-abuses-in-china/>