

SCHOLARS AT RISK

N E T W O R K

His Excellency Zhou Wenzhong
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary
of the People's Republic of China to the
United States of America
Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the
United States of America
3505 International Place NW
Washington, D.C. 20008

July 24, 2009

RE: Professor Ilham Tohti

Your Excellency:

On behalf of the Scholars at Risk Network, I write to express our alarm at recent reports that prominent Chinese Uighur economist Professor Ilham Tohti has been detained.

Scholars at Risk (SAR) is an international network of universities and colleges dedicated to promoting academic freedom and its constituent freedoms of thought, opinion, expression, association and travel. Among its core activities, SAR arranges temporary academic positions at participating network institutions for intellectuals whose lives and careers are threatened in their home countries. Through this same network, Scholars at Risk also undertakes public awareness campaigns and in especially serious cases intervenes on behalf of scholars like Professor Tohti.

We understand that, on July 8th, Ilham Tohti, a professor of economics at Chinese Nationalities University, disappeared from his home in Beijing. The Associated Press reports that a close friend of Professor Tohti received a phone call from him the night of July 7th, informing the friend that he had been interrogated by Chinese officials for the previous two days and received notice he would be detained. Professor Tohti is a founder of Uighurbiz.cn, a popular website that has a lively forum for discussion of Uighur issues, including Chinese rule in Xinjiang; we understand that the site has been censored since 2008.

Professor Tohti's arrest raises grave concerns for his well-being, and the lack of any clear basis for his detention raises grave concerns about the ability of respected scholars and intellectuals generally to safely express their beliefs in China. Especially taking into account the recent events in Western China, this scholar's arrest suggests a wider attempt to intimidate university communities, thereby limiting academic freedom and freedom of expression.

Scholars at Risk therefore joins with the international human rights organizations and individual scholars that respectfully urge that the government of China examine the circumstances of Professor Tohti's detention, disclose his whereabouts and either release Professor Tohti or publicly explain the charges against him. We further urge that the government guarantee Professor Tohti's well-being while in custody, including granting him immediate access to legal counsel, to family and to any necessary medical treatment.

We appreciate your attention to this important matter and look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Robert Quinn
Executive Director

Copies to:

Hillary Clinton
United States Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520, USA

Network for Education and Academic Rights
London South Bank University
90 London Road
SE1 9LN
London, UK
Fax: 0044(0) 207 021 0881
contact "AT" nearinternational.org

Jon M. Huntsman, Jr.
United States Ambassador-Designate to the People's Republic of China
United States Embassy of Beijing, China
No. 55 An Jia Lou Lu 100600
China