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Why it is important for Africa and China that Human Rights Activist Liu Xiabo won the Nobel Peace Prize

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Liu Xiabo is Chinese human rights campaigner, a poet and a literary critic. He is one of the authors of Charter 08, a petition calling for freedom, equality, democracy and constitutional rule in China, including a new constitution, an independent judiciary, the election of public officials and a guarantee of human rights. He is currently serving an 11 year prison term for ?inciting subversion of state power? because of his role in Charter 08 and for other documents he has written in the campaign for human rights in China.The award of the Nobel Prize for Peace for 2010 to Liu Xiabo is a small but important step in the struggle for human rights in China.

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The award of the Nobel Prize for Peace for 2010 to Liu Xiabo is a small but important step in the struggle for human rights in China. His treatment exemplifies the way the Chinese government deals with human rights campaigners. TAC and SECTION27, incorporating the AIDS Law Project, have also called for the release of two other Chinese campaigners, both of whom have worked for the rights of people with HIV, Hu Jia and Tian Xi.

Hu Jia was sentenced to over three years in jail in April 2008, also for subversion. Hu has campaigned for the environment and the rights of people with HIV. He was arrested as part of a government crackdown in 2007 after peasant leaders demanded land rights.2

Tian Xi was a child when he needed a blood transfusion in the 1990s. At the time thousands of people in Henan and other provinces, including Tian, were infected with HIV through state-sponsored blood selling programs. For the last five years Tian Xi has been campaigning for compensation for himself and hundreds of thousands of others affected by HIV-infected blood, as well as for the Chinese government to admit its culpability in the blood scandal and hold those directly responsible to account. We support these demands. He is currently in his second month in prison while awaiting sentence on trumped up charges after his ?trial? in September. Furthermore, officials in Henan province are waging a vindictive defamatory campaign against Tian.3

Over the last decade, China has emerged as a new superpower. Its influence on Africa is growing daily. If it is to serve as a force for good here, then it is vital that it helps, not hinders, the struggle for human rights and democracy on this continent. But China can only do so if it moves towards democracy, demonstrates a commitment to human rights and follows the example of our own country, which in 1994 put trust in its citizens by embracing a constitution that respect, protects and promotes human rights. It is in all of our interests to campaign for democracy in China. It is in China?s interests ? and in keeping with the socialist ideal - that its leaders embrace democratic norms.

Article 33 of the Chinese Constitution states, ?All citizens of the People's Republic of China are equal before the law. Every citizen enjoys the rights and at the same time must perform the duties prescribed by the Constitution and the

law.?

Article 35 states ?Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of procession and of demonstration.?4

The Chinese Government's national human rights plan 2009-2010 reiterates this, stating ?In the period 2009-2010, China will continue to strengthen work to improve democracy and the rule of law, improving systems for democracy, diversifying the forms of democracy and expanding the channels of democracy, strengthening the protection of civil rights in the execution of administrative laws and in judicial practices, and raising the level of ensuring people's civil and political rights.?5

Yet the Chinese state is failing to meet its Constitutional and other legal duties to civil liberty. We call on the Chinese government to adopt an attitude of respect for human rights in line with its own Constitution and national human rights action plan. We restate our call for the immediate release of Tian Xi, Hu Jia, Liu Xiabo and many others who are in prison and whose only crime is to defend and promote human rights.

For media comment, contact:

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Footnotes
1 NobelPrize.org. Fighting with Words for Freedom of Expression. http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2010/speedread.html
2 Wikipedia. Hu Jia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hu_Jia_%28activist%29
3 TAC. Chinese HIV-positive activist Tian Xi to go on trial on trumped up charges. http://www.tac.org.za/community/node/2940
4 Constitution of the People's Republic of China. 1982. http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/constitution/constitution.html
5 Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China. 2009. National Human Rights Action Plan of China (2009-2010). http://www.china.org.cn/archive/2009-04/13/content_17595407_12.htm

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