

Network of Concerned Historians				NCH
Campaigns				
Year original	Year follow-up	Circular	Country	Names
2001		22	China	Tohti Tunyaz, historian
	2004			<i>follow-up 2</i>
	2002			<i>follow-up 1</i>

Announcement

In October 2001 and September 2002, NCH launched appeals for Uighur historian Tohti Tunyaz, sentenced to eleven years' imprisonment in Urumqi, Xinjiang, China (see NCH #22, NCH #22ii). International PEN's Writers in Prison Committee invites us to send a letter in support of Tohti to the Chinese Minister of Justice.

Please find below:

- (1) a NCH case summary;
- (2) part of the article "Silenced Voices" by Siobhan Dowd, published in the Literary Review in 2003 and distributed by PEN;
- (3) a sample letter and addresses.

NCH SUMMARY

In February or April 1998, Tohti Tunyaz (pen name: Tohti Muzart) (1959–), an Uighur historian and writer, born in Kashgar and graduated from the Central Institute of Nationalities history department, Beijing (1984), later assigned to work for the China National Standing Committee, and studying for a Ph.D. in Uighur history and ethnic relations in nineteenth- and twentieth-century China at Tokyo University School of Humanities, Japan (1995–), was arrested in Urumqi, Xinjiang, when returning to China to visit his relatives and do research. His works on Uighur history included one book published in China and several papers published in Japan. In November 1998, he was charged with "illegally acquiring state secrets for foreign persons" because he had copied part of a 50-year-old document provided by an official librarian, and with "inciting separatism" (or "inciting national disunity") because he had allegedly published a book in Japan in 1998, entitled *The Inside Story of the Silk Road*, advocating "ethnic separatism"--although his Japanese supervisor Sato Tsugitaka insisted that no such book exists. In March 1999 Tohti was tried and, following an appeal, sentenced by the Supreme Court in February 2000 to eleven years' imprisonment and two years' deprivation of political rights. The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has declared that Tohti was

“arbitrarily detained.”

SILENCED VOICES -- BY SIOBHAN DOWD

(published in the *Literary Review* in 2003).

The Government of the People’s Republic of China insists that Tohti Tunyaz, a doctoral student in history, wrote a book. Tohti’s professor at Tokyo University in Japan insists he did not. Whatever the truth of the matter one thing is clear: there is no justifiable reason why Tohti Tunyaz, a published academic whose area is the history of the sensitive area of China’s ethnic minorities, should be serving an eleven-year prison sentence. His only proven crime appears to be that of obtaining and copying part of a 50-year-old document for his research with the help of a qualified librarian. The authorities claim that this action was theft of classified information, a charge that anywhere else might have been dismissed out of court. But, in the context of the troubled Xinjiang province from which Tohti Tunyas comes, his punishment for even exploring the explosive question of ethnic minorities, was as swift as it was sure. Today he has been behind bars for nearly four years, and there is no immediate hope, given the currently increasing level of repression in the area, that he will soon be released. [...]

Tohti Tunyaz, aged 42, was born in Kashgar. Little is known about his personal background, but he graduated from the history department of the Central Institute of Nationalities in Beijing in 1984 and was assigned prestigious work for the China National Standing Committee. His interest in his native area never abated, however. He had friends in high places, including former Xinjiang governors Ismail Emet and Seyfudin Eziz and began publishing articles about the region under the pen-name Muzart, Xinjiang’s largest river.

In 1995 he moved to Japan with his wife and children and started a Ph.D at Tokyo University’s School of Humanities, specialising in the history of China’s policy toward minorities in the 19th and 20th centuries. His professor, Tsugitaka Sato, who has defended Tohti staunchly from the time of his arrest, explains that he returned to Xinjiang in 1998 for research purposes; he was neither spy nor terrorist but merely an excellent scholar, seeking source materials for his thesis. Tohti was arrested a few weeks into his trip. He was convicted on charges of inciting national disunity and illegally acquiring state secrets. His appeal to the appeal court failed and he received a sentence of 11 years imprisonment and two years’ deprivation of political rights.

Professor Sato, backed by Tokyo University, has mounted a spirited campaign for Tohti’s freedom.

He has drawn up a careful analysis of the Chinese charges in order to persuade the United Nations Human Rights Committee to take Tohti's part. Sato shows up the inconsistencies in the charges and concludes that the Chinese authorities have based their allegations on a misrepresentation of the facts concerning (Tohti's) scholarly activities. In particular, he proves false their allegation that he published an insidious book in Japan: this book(supposedly entitled The Inside Story of the Silk Road) simply does not exist, although apparently a Japanese publishing house did approach Tohti with the suggestion that he participate in publishing such a book. Sato says that Tohti declined, pleading overwork, but he may have kept a notebook on him with ideas for such a title. He concludes that this might be what the Chinese have used against him; in which case, his conviction for inciting national disunity runs counter to Chinese law which demands an explicit act such as publication for such a charge to be proven. He also argues that his sentence for illegally acquiring state secrets runs out of all permitted proportions for his action in copying out a portion of a 50-year-old document, acquired for him by an official librarian.

The truth of the matter is that Tohti's area of interest touched a raw nerve, at a time of official confusion regarding the political hot potato of how to deal with China's ever more vociferous ethnic minorities.

Today, Tohti Tunyaz has exhausted his appeals and remains incarcerated in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region Prison Number Three in the provincial capital of Urumqi. No information is available as to his health. When his professor travelled to China to visit him, he was not given permission to do so. His wife and family remain in Japan and concern for his wellbeing mounts.

PLEASE WRITE APPEALING POLITELY FOR TOHTI TUNYAZ'S RELEASE TO:

His Excellency Zhang Fusen
Minister of Justice
Sifabu Xianguangli
Beijing 100016
People's Republic of China
Fax: +011 86 10 6839 3014 or 6529 2345
E-mail: <minister@legalinfo.gov.cn>

Dear Minister,

I wish to add my name to this appeal from International PEN. PEN is calling for the release of historian and writer Tohti Tunyaz (Muzart).

Tohti Tunyaz is an ethnic Uighur historian and writer from Xinjiang Province. He was arrested in February 1998, and in February 2000 he was sentenced to eleven years' imprisonment and two years' deprivation of political rights. He was arrested in Urumqi, Xinjiang Province, where he had gone to collect research material. He had reportedly been watched by security police for some time prior to his arrest, and was said to have been arrested with allegedly sensitive material. Some reports claim that the content of this material was on ethnic relations published for classified circles only; others that it was material published for the general public. Tohti Tunyaz was reportedly formally charged with "inciting national disunity" and "stealing state secrets for foreign persons".

Tunyaz started studying for his Ph.D at Tokyo University in 1995, specializing in Uighur history and ethnic relations, and it is thought that the charges against him may be linked to his research. Tunyaz has exhausted his appeals and remains incarcerated in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region Prison Number Three in Urumqi.

PEN believes the detention of Tohti Tunyaz is in violation of his right to freedom of expression as guaranteed by Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which China has ratified. PEN calls for the immediate and unconditional release of Tohti Tunyaz as well as for all charges against him to be dropped.

Sincerely,

[Your name and address]

COPIES TO:

President of the People's Republic of China

Hu Jintao

The State Council General Office

Yongneixijie

Beijing 100701

People's Republic of China

For further information please contact Sara Whyatt - WiPC Programme Director at

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