

Cambodia: UN experts call for immediate release of five human rights defenders

25 January 2017 – Two United Nations human rights experts today called on the Government of Cambodia for the immediate release of five human rights defenders detained in May 2016 on charges, which they see as politically motivated.

The use of criminal provisions as a pretext to suppress and prevent the legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of expression and to silence human rights defenders is incompatible with article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, (ICCPR), which has been signed by Cambodia, said the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia, Rhona Smith, in a news release issued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Ms. Smith recalled that, on 11 May 2016, a group of UN human rights experts sent a follow-up joint urgent appeal to the Cambodian Government on the cases of the five detainees, but has not received any response to date.

The experts requested detailed information on the legal basis for the detention of four staff of human rights NGO Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC) – Lim Mony, Ny Vanda, Ny Sokha and Yi Soksan – as well as the Deputy Secretary General of the National Election Committee and former ADHOC staff member, Ny Chakrya.

As a party to the ICCPR, Cambodia is obliged to respect freedom of expression and the right to a fair trial, which entails a prompt and fair trial within a reasonable period of time or release, Ms. Smith stressed.

With so much effort and resources invested in improving the functioning of the judiciary, which had begun to see improvements in some respects, all that is lost with these cases, she cautioned. They have damaged even further the standing of the Cambodian judiciary, which according to studies commands the least respect of the public among all the State institutions.

The Special Rapporteur's call was also endorsed by human rights expert Sètonджи Roland Adjovi, who currently heads the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

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Global Crude oil price of Indian Basket was US\$ 54.34 per bbl on 24.01.2017

The international crude oil price of Indian Basket as computed/published today by Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC) under the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas was US\$ 54.34 per barrel (bbl) on 24.01.2017.

Activist unhappy with zoo's explanation

An animal welfare campaigner has accused the head of a Hangzhou zoo of failing to properly answer accusations over abuse of its tigers.

Hu Chunmei triggered widespread outrage when she shared edited footage online of a performance involving white tigers at Hangzhou Safari Park, which she recorded on Jan 12.

The two-minute clip features a confrontation between a tiger and a handler, which ended with the animal falling off the stage into a pool of water, and images of a tiger with a wound on the right side of its nose.

The footage has been shared thousands of times on Sina Weibo and other social media platforms, with many netizens criticizing the park.

In response, a manager at the zoo who was identified only as Ma gave an interview on Monday to Qianjiang Evening News, a local daily, in which he denied the animals had been abused.

However, Hu, head of the Saving Performing Animals Project run by the China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation, a private NGO based in Beijing, said she was not satisfied with his explanation.

“He showed a photo of a tiger to the newspaper, saying that it was the one that fell into the water and that it was in a very good condition. But it’s not the same tiger. Its stripes are clearly different than the one in the video,” she said.

“The zoo manager also said the tiger that fell into the water was the same one with the wound on its face. He’s not telling the truth. When the tiger falls in the video, the one with a scar on its nose can be seen on the other side of the stage.”

Ma was quoted by the paper as saying the wound was an “inflammation of lymph nodes below the skin” and that the reason the animal had no canine teeth was because it was “in a dental transitional period”. All the tigers in the show were under the age of 3, he added.

Calls to the management office at Hangzhou Safari Park went unanswered on Tuesday.

The tourist attraction, which is in Fuyang district of Hangzhou, the capital of Zhejiang province, has been in operation since 2002 and is the largest wildlife park in East China, covering 2.66 square kilometers.

A statement issued on Monday by the Zhejiang Forestry Administration said the park had been ordered to suspend all animal performances.

HK returns armed vehicles to Singapore

Hong Kong customs officials announced on Tuesday that nine Singaporean armed vehicles seized two months ago will be returned after the completion of an investigation.

The Singaporean vehicles were impounded by customs on Nov 23 “because there was a suspected breach of Hong Kong law”, said Roy Tang, commissioner of customs and excise of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

The armed vehicles were inside a cargo ship from Taiwan that was passing through Hong Kong. They were on their way back to Singapore following a military drill in Taiwan.

Tang said that customs has finished its investigation. The case may lead to

criminal prosecution, according to a news release from the Hong Kong government.

“Import, export and transshipment/transit of strategic commodities in breach of licensing requirements are criminal offenses punishable under the Hong Kong law,” he said, adding that the military vehicles and the associated equipment will be returned to Singapore.

In a statement released on Tuesday, Singapore’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong had thanked Hong Kong Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying for resolving the matter.

“This is a positive outcome,” the Singaporean ministry said.

On Jan 17 in Beijing, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying urged the Singaporean government to stick to the one-China principle when she was asked about the seizure of the vehicles.

China attaches great importance to its relationship with Singapore, and at the same time, China’s stance on the one-China principle is firm and unchanged, she said.

Jia Duqiang, a senior researcher in Southeast Asia studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said that by seizing the vehicles, China sent a signal to Singapore that the city-state should stick to the one-China principle, especially as Taiwan authorities led by Tsai Ing-wen are challenging Beijing on sovereignty.

Returning the vehicles is a positive sign for the China-Singapore relationship, he said, adding that bilateral ties have been frustrated in recent months as a result of what he called Singapore’s “improper remarks” on China’s stance on the South China Sea issue.

In July, Singapore asked “all parties to fully respect” the ruling of an arbitration case on South China Sea territorial disputes. China insisted that the ruling is “null and void”, and has no binding force.