



PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release – 18 April 2007

Leading Uighur Activist Imprisoned in China for Sedition

ARTICLE 19 strongly protests the conviction yesterday of Uighur activist Ablikim Abdiriyim, allegedly for separatist acts resulting from his peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression through the Internet. Abdiriyim was sentenced to nine years imprisonment and three years deprivation of political rights on the basis that he was “instigating and engaging in secessionist activities”, turning the public against the Chinese government and distorting China’s human rights and ethnic policies.

Dr Agnès Callamard, Executive Director, ARTICLE 19 said: *“China is notorious the world over for its persistent abuse of freedom of expression and the restrictions it places on the Internet and other media. The case of Ablikim Abdiriyim clearly illustrates this.”*

According to the Chinese State news agency, Xinhua, on 17 July 2004, Abdiriyim requested that two articles he had downloaded from the Internet – entitled “Issues to be aware of and prohibited in Jihad” and “Struggle toward Independence” – be uploaded by the Uighur-language Yahoo webmaster. He was also said to have collaborated in plans to “stir up public protest against the local government” and, in April 2004, to have “circulated the rumour that the government was going to close down Rebiya Building Co. Ltd, a company named after his mother Rebiya Kadeer”, a 2006 Nobel Peace Prize nominee. Xinhua also reported allegations that, on 28 May 2006, Abdiriyim emailed an article that “distorted China’s human rights system and ethnic policies” to his mother and stepfather in exile in the United States.

Abdiriyim’s mother, Rebiya Kadeer, has protested that her son is innocent and did not engage in the activities charged. Amnesty International last month confirmed that Abdiriyim was very ill as a result of severe beatings suffered in custody. He has reportedly been denied access to medical care.

ARTICLE 19 takes no position on the facts of the case but notes that it is perfectly legitimate to discuss separatist issues, to criticise the government and to engage in critical and even harsh reporting on human rights issues. It is only where expression constitutes direct and intentional incitement to violence or other illegal acts that it may be banned

The imprisonment of Abdiriyim is part of a wider context of increasing limits being placed on freedom of expression in China under the guise of the war on terror. Uighur activists have been brandished as terrorists and, since joining the United State’s War on Terror Coalition in September 2001, the Chinese government has increasingly cited the need to fight terrorism as a justification for limiting the freedom of expression and other rights of the Uighur and general Chinese populations.

ARTICLE 19 strongly condemns the imprisonment of Abdiriyim as an abuse of his right to freedom of expression and we call on the Chinese government:

- To release Ablikim Abdiriyim immediately, to restore his political rights and to ensure that he receives the urgent medical care he needs.
- To protect the right of all Chinese citizens, including those from Uighur-speaking regions, to exercise their right to freedom of expression without fear of persecution.

BACKGROUND

Ablikim Abdiriyim is a member of the large Uighur population of the Xinjiang region of China, many of whom want an independent homeland. Abdiriyim's mother, Nobel Peace Prize nominee 2006, Rebiya Kadeer, was imprisoned in 1999 for six years under charges of "leaking state secrets". Upon her release, in March 2005, and under intense international pressure, she was exiled to the US where she has continued her work for the rights of the Uighur people. Advocates have condemned the persistent persecution of Kadeer's family at the hands of the Chinese government, including the charges of tax evasion laid against two of her sons, Alim and Kahar, in October last year which resulted in fines of millions of dollars and the imprisonment of Alim for seven years.

NOTES TO EDITORS

- For more information, please contact Catrina Pickering, Asia Programmes Officer, tel: +44 (0)20 7239 1193, email: catrina@article19.org.
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees freedom of expression.