



## PRESS STATEMENT

### China Reacts Negatively to Lawsuit Against Beijing Mayor for Serious Human Rights Violations

San Francisco, February 12, 2002

A lawsuit filed in the United States by Falun Gong practitioners against visiting Beijing Mayor Liu Qi is a "nasty trick" aimed at derailing Sino-American relations, the Chinese foreign ministry said Sunday according to press accounts.

Liu Qi was sued pursuant to a 1789 law, the Alien Tort Claims Act, which authorizes U.S. courts to hear cases brought for "violations of the law of nations" so long as the perpetrator can be physically served while in the United States. Falun Gong practitioners were able to serve the Mayor at San Francisco International Airport en route to Salt Lake City for the Olympics.

The suit claims that Beijing police have engaged in systematic repression of Falun Gong practitioners and that Mayor Liu has allowed such abuses to go unchecked. The suit was brought by six practitioners who were severely beaten by Beijing police in detention centers in Beijing during the last three years. They include two Chinese women who are now refugees in the U.S., one man with joint U.S. and Israeli citizenship, two Swedish men and a French woman. One of the Chinese plaintiffs was tortured by electric shock.

The suit was filed by the Center for Justice & Accountability (CJA), a San Francisco-based human rights organization that represents victims of grave human rights abuses committed outside the United States in legal actions against their persecutors.

Sandra Coliver, CJA's Executive Director stated: "CJA is involved in this lawsuit in order to send the message that people who engage in serious violations of internationally recognized human rights can and will be held accountable by the courts of the United States if they choose to visit here. They may have impunity within the borders of their own country, but they cannot visit the U.S. without running the risk that their victims will find and sue them."

Joshua Sondheimer, CJA's Director of Civil Litigation stated: "The Mayor of Beijing, by virtue of his position as head of the executive branch, is required to ensure that the Beijing police respect the rights of detainees. We expect to prove that he knew about repeated unlawful arrests and physical abuse of Falun Gong practitioners and yet took no steps to prevent the abuses or punish the culprits, and that he directly contributed to implementation of a policy of systematic and brutal repression."

According to a Reuters report filed January 15, 2001, Mayor Liu told an Olympics rally in September 2000 that the city would "resolutely smash and crack down on Falun Gong and other evil cults" to prepare for the 2008 bid.

Mr. Sondheimer noted that, "This case follows a string of similar suits in which courts have recognized that foreign officials who bear responsibility for grave human rights violations may be held responsible when they visit this country."

Several other foreign officials have been sued while visiting the United States. Most recently, in September 2001, a court in Washington DC ordered General Johnny Lumintang, the second highest ranking officer in Indonesia's army, to pay \$66 million to East Timorese victims of violence committed in 1999 in connection with the independence referendum. CJA was involved as co-counsel in that case as well.

Other foreign officials who have been successfully sued while visiting the U.S. are Radovan Karadzic, the self-proclaimed leader of the break-away Bosnian Serb Republic, currently under indictment by the Hague and at large in Serb-controlled territory; Hector Gramajo, former Guatemalan Minister of Defense; Americo Pena-Irala, a Paraguayan police officer; and Jean Bosco Barayagwiza, a Rwandan paramilitary leader.

## BACKGROUND

The Center for Justice and Accountability is an international human rights organization that works to stop torture and other serious human rights abuses around the world by helping the survivors of such abuses hold their persecutors accountable, especially those who live in or visit the United States. Launched in 1998 with support from Amnesty International USA and the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, CJA brings civil lawsuits in U.S. courts under the Alien Tort Claims Act and Torture Victim Protection Act, laws that allow federal courts to award damages against perpetrators of serious human rights violations who live in, visit or keep asset in the U.S.

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For more information about CJA, please visit our web site: <http://www.cja.org/>.

Tel: 415.544.0444 // Fax: 415.544.0456