



AI Group 48 February 2025 Newsletter

Next Meeting February 13th On Zoom



Join us for our Annual General Meeting 2025 (AGM'25) and continue the fight for human rights.

The AGM is Amnesty International USA's largest gathering of activists. The conference will reinvigorate our motivation, provide opportunities to learn from, network with, and connect with leading human rights experts, vote on key decisions for the organization, and build organizing skills to use in your communities.

Virtual Registration closes

Friday, Feb. 14th

Register Here:

<https://www.amnestyusa.org/agm2025/#registration>

Urgent Action: China: Prominent artist arrested for his work

NAME AND PRONOUN: Gao Zhen (he/him/his)

Gao Zhen, 68 years old, is a prominent artist in contemporary Chinese art and a member of the renowned Gao Brothers duo. Since the 1980s, the Gao Brothers have employed satirical humor to shed light on the atrocities of the Cultural Revolution, consistently challenging the limits of social commentary. Their work offers a sharp critique of the Cultural Revolution and former Chinese leader, Mao Zedong, exposing the extent of the authoritarian practices employed during Mao's regime. These subjects remain deeply sensitive and taboo in contemporary China.



On August 26, 2024, Gao was detained while traveling in China with his wife and son. Around 30 police officers raided his studio in Yanjiao, a town in Sanhe City, Hebei province. The authorities photographed his artworks, confiscated and sealed several sculptures—most of which were created over a decade ago—before sealing the studio.

The following day, Gao's wife was informed by the Sanhe City Public Security Bureau of his detention. He has since been held at the Sanhe City Detention Center on charges of "slandering China's heroes and martyrs," a crime punishable by up to three years in prison. This crime stems from a 2018 Law on the Protection of Heroes and Martyrs, which, in an article marking its adoption, state media claimed aims to "promote patriotism and socialist core values" and was necessary in light of a "string of cases" purported to slander or denigrate heroes in the name of, for example, academic freedom. As with many laws in China, the vague nature of the law, lack of definitions, and latitude provided to security and judicial officials in interpreting its application make it easy to abuse this law to restrict legitimate forms of opinion and expression.

Gao and his wife are Chinese citizens; since 2011, Gao has been a U.S. permanent resident. Their 6-year-old son is a U.S. citizen and attended school in New York, where the family moved in 2022.

Sample Letter

Dear Director Pan

On August 26, 2024, Gao Zhen, a prominent Chinese artist, was detained by authorities while traveling in China with his wife and son.

Gao is charged with “slandering China’s heroes and martyrs,” a crime punishable by up to three years in prison. His formal arrest has been approved, and his wife and child have been prevented from leaving China. Chinese authorities must release Gao Zhen immediately and unconditionally, and cease using this and other laws to stifle creative expression.

I am writing to express my grave concern for artist Gao Zhen, who is currently detained at Sanhe City Detention Center on charges of ‘slandering China’s heroes and martyrs’ — a crime punishable by up to three years in prison. His formal arrest has been approved, but these charges are baseless; he has merely exercised his right to freedom of expression, especially artistic expression and creation.

My distress is heightened by concerns that Gao’s wife and their 6-year-old son, a United States citizen, were barred from leaving China when they attempted to return to New York following Gao’s detention in August 2024.

I fear that Gao Zhen’s case may signal a more robust use by authorities of the vague crime of “slandering China’s heroes and martyrs” to target freedom of artistic expression and creation. Gao and his brother’s works are reported to be the sole basis for his arrest. It is furthermore concerning that this crime seems to run contrary to protections for freedom of speech set out in China’s Constitution.

I urge you to immediately and unconditionally release Gao Zhen. Pending his release, I urge you to ensure that Gao Zhen has regular, unrestricted access to his family and lawyers, and is not subject to torture or other ill-treatment. I ask that you stop harassing and threatening his family and ensure that they can enter and leave China freely. Finally, I ask you to ensure that Chinese artists can express their views without fear of persecution or arbitrary detention.

Yours sincerely,

Take Action:

- Write a letter in your own words or using the sample below as a guide to one or both government officials listed.

You can also email, fax, call or Tweet them.

- Click [here](#) to let us know the actions you took on Urgent Action 106.24. It’s important to report because we share the total number with the officials we are trying to persuade and the people we are trying to help.

Director Pan Jiqiang,
Sanhe Public Security Bureau in Langfang
City, Hebei Province
No.3, Dingsheng West Street,
Sanhe City, Langfang,
Hebei Province, 065200,
People’s Republic of China

CC: Embassy of the People’s Republic of
China in the United States
Ambassador Xie Fang
3505 International Place, NW,
Washington DC 20008
Phone: (202) 495-2266
Email: chinaembpress.us@mfa.gov.cn

Please take action as soon as possible
until March 30, 2025

Group Coordinators

Marty Fromer and Terrie Rodello

Treasurer -- Tena Hoke

Newsletter -- Daniel Webb

OR Area Coordinator -- Marty Fromer

Indonesia actions -- Max White

China / Uyghur actions -- Marty Fromer

Iran POC -- Tena Hoke

Concert Tabling -- Will Ware

Central Africa/ Oregon State Death

Penalty Abolition-- Terrie Rodello

Postage Rates: Within the United States

\$0.73 - Domestic Letter up to 1oz,
standard envelope size

\$0.56 - Domestic Postcard
International Postage

\$1.65 - Up to 1 oz



Urgent Action: Iran Prisoners at Imminent Risk of Execution

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Behrouz Ehsani and Mehdi Hassani (both he/him).

Behrouz Ehsani, 69, and Mehdi Hassani, 48, are at imminent risk of execution after the Supreme Court upheld their death sentences in early January. On January 26, they were transferred from Tehran's Evin prison to Ghezel Hesar prison, Alborz province, raising fears their executions could be implemented at any time. Their grossly unfair trial was marred by allegations of torture and forced "confessions".

Behrouz Ehsani and Mehdi Hassani were also convicted of multiple other charges including "spreading propaganda against the system", "gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security", and "membership of a group with the purpose of disrupting national security" for which they received prison sentences. According to informed sources, prison officials have told them their death sentences would be quashed if they write a letter of repentance and express remorse, but they have refused, insisting on their innocence.

Since February 2024, Behrouz Ehsani and Mehdi Hassani have been on hunger strike every Tuesday as part of the "No to Execution Tuesdays" campaign by Iranians, which began in January 2024. On September 18, 2024, a letter written by Behrouz Ehsani referred to the hunger strikes that he, Mehdi Hassani, and scores of others on death row across Iran have undertaken and underscored the need for international support to end the cruel and inhumane executions in Iran. Part of the letter wrote:

"...After 22 months of uncertainty, they [the authorities] have now issued a death sentence against me without any evidence. We expect nothing else from this execution-driven system...In addition to political prisoners, ordinary prisoners are executed every day...who are the defenseless victims of this system and its conditions. We have now completed the 34th week of the 'No to Executions' Tuesday hunger strikes, alongside [prisoners from] 21 other prisons across the country. We will continue these hunger strikes every Tuesday as long as executions continue to take place. I call on my dear compatriots, international organizations, and human rights institutions to take action against executions in Iran today because tomorrow will be too late. Join us in the 'No to Executions' Tuesday movement. People who seek



freedom and democracy do not deserve execution. The silence of the international community emboldens this regime to carry out its executions."

Amnesty International has previously documented how trials held in Revolutionary Courts are systematically unfair and result in arbitrary executions. The organization has documented hundreds of cases over decades where criminal proceedings held before Revolutionary Courts, leading to prison and death sentences, gravely violated the right to a fair trial.

Over the past two years, in the aftermath of the Woman Life Freedom uprising, the Iranian authorities have intensified their use of the death penalty. In 2023, Amnesty International recorded the executions of at least 853 people by the Iranian authorities, marking a 48% increase from 2022. The majority of people were executed arbitrarily after grossly unfair trials before Revolutionary Courts. In 2024, the authorities continued their execution spree, including against protesters, dissidents, and ethnic minorities. The real number of executions is likely to be far higher as the Iranian authorities are not transparent and do not provide publicly accessible information on executions.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases without exception. The death penalty is a violation of the right to life as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the ultimate cruel, inhuman, and degrading punishment.

Sample Letter

Dear Mr. Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei,

I am deeply concerned that Behrouz Ehsani, 69, and Mehdi Hassani, 48, are at imminent risk of execution. On January 7, 2025, the authorities notified their lawyers that their convictions and death sentences, issued on September 15, 2024, after a grossly unfair trial, have been upheld by the Supreme Court. They were sentenced to death on charges of “armed rebellion against the state” (baghi), “enmity against God” (moharebeh), and “corruption on earth” (efsad-e fel-arz) in relation to their alleged support of the People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI), a banned opposition group. Their lawyers have applied for a judicial review of their case. On January 26, 2025, without prior notice to them or their lawyers and families, they were transferred from Evin prison to Ghezel Hesar prison, Alborz province, where authorities move prisoners for execution. The authorities have given no information to their families and lawyers since the transfer, raising serious concerns that they plan to execute them imminently.

Ministry of Intelligence agents arrested Behrouz Ehsani on November 28, 2022 in Tehran and Mehdi Hassani on September 9, 2022 in Zanjan province. According to informed sources, agents interrogated them without lawyers present and subjected them to torture and other ill-treatment, including beatings and prolonged solitary confinement, to extract self-incriminating statements. They were tried jointly in a five-minute trial session on August 10, 2024 in grossly unfair proceedings before Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran. They were denied access to their lawyers for nearly two years, from the time of arrest until weeks before trial. Their torture allegations were not investigated, and they were denied trial before by an independent, competent and impartial tribunal. Both men have denied the charges against them.

I urge you to immediately halt any plans to execute Behrouz Ehsani and Mehdi Hassani and quash their convictions and sentences; grant them regular access to their families, independently chosen lawyers,

and to any adequate medical care they may need; and protect them from further torture and other ill-treatment and investigate their torture allegations.

Yours sincerely,



TAKE ACTION:

- Write a letter to the government official(s) listed. Use the sample letter below as a guide or use your own words.

Click [here](#) to report your action(s) on UA 10.25. We share this number with the officials we are trying to persuade.

Head of judiciary,
Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei
c/o Embassy of Iran to the European Union,
Avenue Franklin Roosevelt No. 15,
1050 Bruxelles, Belgium

CC: Supreme Leader ‘Ali Khamenei
c/o Permanent Mission of the
Islamic Republic of Iran
to the United Nations
622 3rd Ave, 34th floor,
New York, NY 10017
Email: iranunny@mfa.gov.ir

Please take action as soon as possible until
March 24, 2025

USA: Sanctions Against International Criminal Court Betray International Justice System

February 6, 2025--In response to the executive order announced today by President Trump imposing sanctions on the International Criminal Court (ICC), Agnès Callamard, Amnesty International's Secretary General, said:

"This reckless action sends the message that Israel is above the law and the universal principles of international justice. It suggests that President Trump endorses the Israeli government's crimes and is embracing impunity.

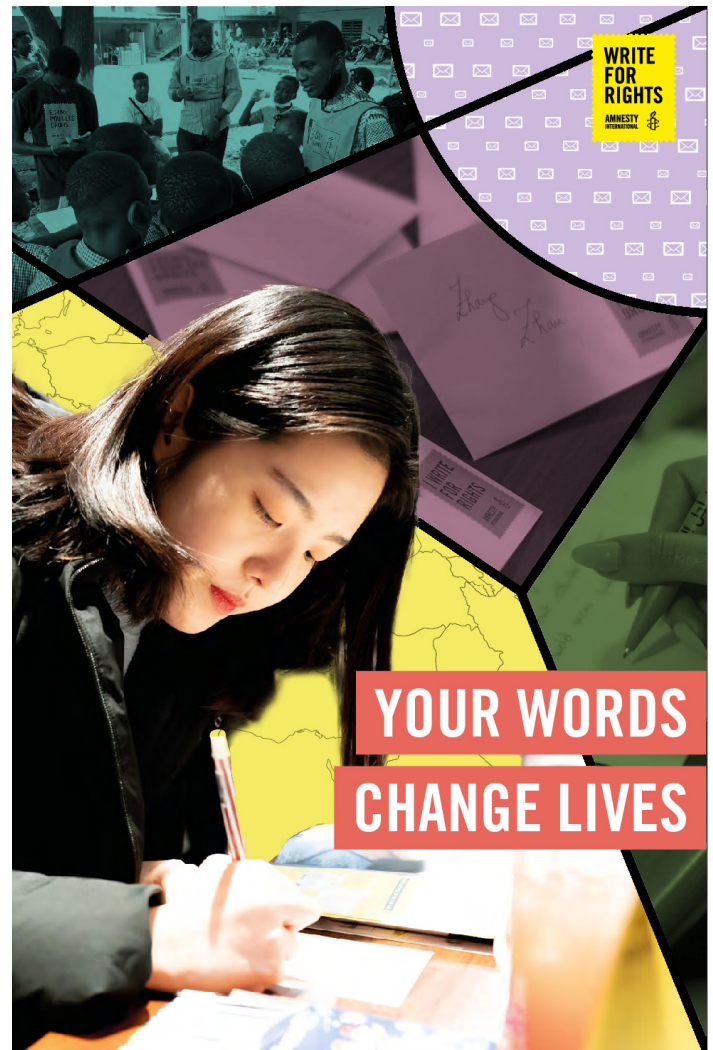
"Today's executive order is vindictive. It is aggressive. It is a brutal step that seeks to undermine and destroy what the international community has painstakingly constructed over decades, if not centuries: global rules that are applicable to everyone and aim to deliver justice for all. The sanctions constitute another betrayal of our common humanity.

"The United States is ready to punish an institution that ensures the individuals most responsible for committing atrocities cannot escape justice. No one responsible for crimes under international law should be protected or aided in their attempts to escape individual accountability, least of all with the assistance of the U.S. government based on President Trump's political alliances."

"At an historic moment when we are witnessing a genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, Russia's aggression against Ukraine, and the global rule of law coming under threat from multiple fronts, institutions like the Court are needed more than ever to advance human rights protections, prevent future atrocities and secure justice for victims.

"This attack against the ICC seeks to damage the Court's independent pursuit of international justice. The sanctions issued will harm accountability, a crucial ingredient to global and long-term security. They will embolden perpetrators, present and future. They will negatively impact the interests of all victims globally and those who look to the Court for justice in all the countries where it's conducting investigations, including Darfur, Libya, the Philippines, Palestine, Ukraine and Venezuela.

"The ICC performs a vital role by investigating crimes under international law, often committed by the most powerful individuals, in situations where – without its involvement – the perpetrators would benefit from perpetual impunity. The sanctions



are also an affront to 125 member states who have collectively resolved that the Court must be able to effectively pursue justice – which means it must be able to undertake independent judicial functions, such as issuing arrest warrants, for example, against Benjamin Netanyahu or Vladimir Putin.

"Governments around the world and regional organizations must do everything in their power to mitigate and block the effect of President Trump's sanctions. Through collective and concerted actions, ICC member states can protect the Court and its staff. Urgent action is needed, like never before."

On January 14, Amnesty International, the Coalition for the International Criminal Court and more than 140 of its member NGOs and coalitions from around the world issued a joint statement opens in a new tab opposing U.S. efforts to impose sanctions related to the ICC and urging member states to defend the Court, its officials, and those cooperating with it from measures aimed at undermining its vital mandate for justice.