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Kate Krauss, (English) +1-215-939-7852 (cell)
NYC: Laurie Wen, cell:+ 347-210-8544 (lauriewen@aol.com)
DC: David Bryden 202-549-3664 (cell)
Paris: Khalil Elouardighi (English or French): +33 6 6315 3882

AIDS Activists Stage Symbolic Hunger Strikes in New York, Washington and Paris in Solidarity with Hu Jia, Others

See Photos:

<http://aidspolicyproject.org>
<http://aidspolicyproject.org/March22photos.dwt>
<http://aidspolicyproject.org/dcpphotos.html>
<http://aidspolicyproject.org/nyphotos.html>

Angry activists from a range of AIDS, China, student and human rights groups held symbolic hunger strikes in New York City; Washington, DC; and Paris on Wednesday in solidarity with Hu Jia and other Chinese activists who have been imprisoned by the authorities. They have been detained for organizing their own symbolic hunger strikes in China to protest beatings and detention of Chinese activists and their attorneys. Several prominent activists and several supporters are currently in detention, including renowned AIDS activist Hu, who most recently served as director of Loving Source, a Beijing NGO that supports AIDS orphans.

In China, participants have posted photographs of themselves on the internet fasting in a "virtual" grassroots protest. Western activists have posted their photographs on the web, joining the Chinese protest.

Said Kate Krauss, a founder of the AIDS Policy Project, "The Chinese government continues to intimidate, beat, and imprison many of its leading lights: Its smartest AIDS experts, its best reporters and lawyers. But the practice of rounding up and detaining everyone who disagrees with you isn't a sustainable strategy over the long run. We are asking the Chinese government to release these hunger strikers immediately."

Participants in today's actions come from groups ranging from the ACT UP New York and Amnesty International to the American Medical Students Association and the Student Global AIDS Campaign. The actions will take place at the Chinese embassies and consulates in each city. Each group tried to present a solidarity letter to officials but embassy and consular officials refused to accept them. The letter is signed by a broad-based coalition of international HIV/AIDS, development and human rights organizations, along with over one hundred university professors and other individuals. It calls for China to immediately release activists who were detained for participating in the peaceful hunger strike.

In mid-February, a respected group of Chinese public officials and media leaders issued a letter calling on the government to restore freedom of expression. There has also been a crackdown on freedom of the press; about two dozen reporters are currently in detention, and one died of a police beating in early February.

Some activists have simply disappeared, and police have refused to release information to their families about their whereabouts.

Groups signing on to the protest letter include Human Rights Watch, the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, AIDS Policy Project, Thai AIDS Treatment Action Group, the Committee for Human Rights of the American Anthropological Association, and China Labor Watch. Health and development groups from Europe, Africa and Mexico have also signed on.

Leading China scholars, including Professors Theodore De Bary, Jerome Cohen (NYU), Andrew Nathan (Columbia University), and Perry Link (Princeton) have also lent their names. The letter can be viewed at www.aidspolicyproject.org.

The AIDS Policy Project (www.aidspolicyproject.org), founded in 2002, is a US-based AIDS NGO that works in solidarity with AIDS activists in Africa and Asia and supports effective funding mechanisms for addressing the epidemic.