

At what cost?

The international community cannot continue to ignore the worsening human rights situation in China, writes **Edward McMillan-Scott**

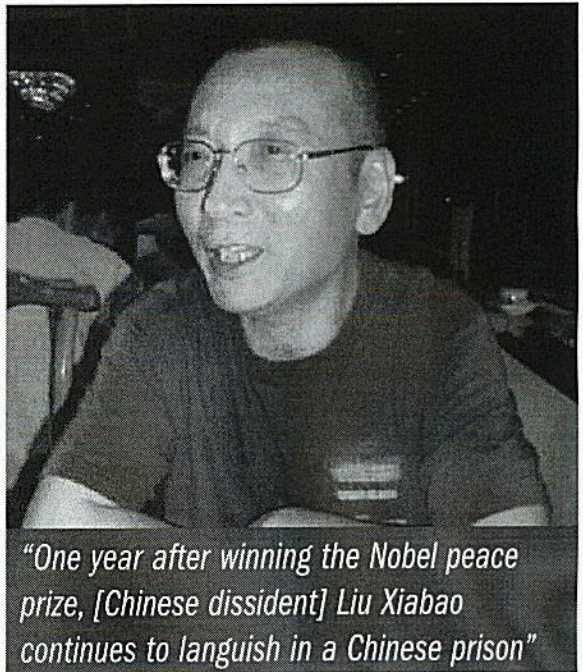
It was an honour to represent the European parliament at the Nobel ceremony last December, when the prize was awarded to courageous Chinese dissident. Liu Xiabao. Liu published 'Charter 08' in emulation of the ground-breaking Charter 77, which many believe was the spiritual background for the freedom now enjoyed across our continent. At the ceremony, 1000 politicians, civil servants, NGO representatives and exiled Chinese – the embodiment of the free world – rose in spontaneous standing ovation to the empty chair representing the imprisoned Liu

China's economic success is based on totalitarian tactics which many ignore, but I cannot because it is my job to record them and because people are in prison today in China because they had contact with me. One year after winning the Nobel peace prize, Liu continues to languish in a Chinese prison without regular family visits. His wife has been under unlawful house arrest since October 18, 2010.

All hopes were dashed if anyone had expected that some positive change in the human rights situation in China would result from awarding the Nobel peace prize to a Chinese citizen for the first time. Instead, in February, 2011, the Chinese government responded to online calls for "Jasmine Revolution" protests with one of the harshest crackdowns on dissent and activism since the post-Tiananmen era. This included detention, enforced disappearances and the use of 'Re-education Through Labour' (RTL) facilities.

To ensure that the law cannot be used to protect these activists from the state's arbitrary power, in August 2011 the Chinese government announced plans to revise the criminal procedure law to effectively legalise the practice of enforced disappearance. Among the wide-ranging proposed revisions to the criminal procedure law, one of the most alarming changes governs the use of "residential surveillance" by the police. Instead of being detained in their homes as in ordinary cases, suspects accused of "endangering state security, terrorist crimes and major bribery crimes" could be held in "a specified residence".

Liu was initially subject to exactly this form of unlawful secret detention – he was held in an undisclosed location for six



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months in 2009. Liu was not permitted contact with his lawyer. His wife was the only person allowed to see him for two very brief visits. Since then, the same kind of arbitrary detention has been applied on multiple occasions, for example, to Ai Weiwei and other rights activists and lawyers.

Ai Weiwei – who designed the Olympic Bird's Nest but refused to attend the games in protest at the "disgusting" regime – told me that the regime is 'finished' because young people were intolerant of the Communist Party's corruption and brutality. We spoke of the distinguished Christian human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng. Gao has been in prison since August 2006 because of his investigation into the persecution by the regime of the harmless Falun Gong Buddha-school movement, which accounts for some two-thirds of those undergoing RTL, according to the UN's torture rapporteur. At least 3000 have died under torture since 1999. Gao has not been seen since April 2010. I know he too has been tortured, Apparently video of this torture was shown to Ai Weiwei to warn him to stay in line. But Ai Weiwei will not stay in line and one day soon, the Jasmine Revolution will sweep away the regime which has murdered some 38 million of its own people since 1949.★

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