

Activists call on China to release Nobel laureate Liu Xiaobo for cancer treatment abroad

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Evacuation of political prisoner must be allowed after foreign doctors cleared him to travel, say Amnesty and others.

Activists are demanding the immediate release of China's most famous political prisoner, the critically ill Nobel laureate Liu Xiaobo, after two foreign doctors said he is well enough to leave the country, contradicting Chinese claims that it would be unsafe.

China has so far refused to allow the democracy campaigner, who was recently diagnosed with late-stage liver cancer [\[1\]](#) having spent more than seven years in jail, to leave the country. Beijing has accused foreign governments calling for Liu's complete release of meddling in China's internal affairs [\[2\]](#).

China allowed two foreign doctors from Germany and the United States to visit Liu at a hospital in north-east China on Saturday. In a subsequent statement, the hospital claimed they had "fully approved" of his treatment and were told "transferring the patient would not be safe".

However, those doctors - an oncologist from Texas's MD Anderson Cancer Center, Dr Joseph M Herman, and a specialist in pancreatic surgery from Germany's Heidelberg University, Dr Markus Büchler - have contradicted that claim.

In a joint statement released on Sunday, Herman and Büchler said they believed the dissident could in fact be safely evacuated from China, and that Liu's family wanted for that to happen so he could be treated in either Germany or the US [\[3\]](#).

"While a degree of risk always exists in the movement of any patient, both physicians believe Liu can be safely transported with appropriate medical evacuation care and support. However, the medical evacuation would have to take place as quickly as possible."

Hong Kong pro-democracy protesters carry a large image of Liu Xiaobo on 1 July

Hong Kong pro-democracy protesters carry a large image of Liu Xiaobo on 1 July. Photograph: Vincent Yu/AP

The two doctors said they acknowledged the quality of care Liu had been receiving from Chinese medics and agreed with their diagnosis of primary liver cancer. However, they also said they believed additional treatment "options" might exist and that their hospitals were ready to offer Liu "the best care possible".

Nicholas Bequelin, Amnesty International's East Asia director, said the doctors' announcement "exposed the mendacity of the authorities' argument that Liu is too sick to be transferred". He called on China's president, Xi Jinping, to immediately allow the activist to be evacuated overseas.

"There is only one person in China that has the authority to rule on the fate of Liu Xiaobo and that is Xi Jinping," Bequelin said.

"What the rulers in Beijing should do is what they have done all along: coldly calculate what are the risks and benefits of letting Liu Xiaobo go abroad to seek treatment and conclude that it is in its best interests to let him go."

Jared Genser, a US lawyer who represents Liu, said that if Xi refused to let the dying dissident seek potentially life-extending medical treatment abroad, he would be viewed as having deliberately cut short a man's life.

"My view is that if Xi doesn't do that then it will be viewed publicly as an extraordinarily callous and weak position for China to put itself in," Genser, who is known for his work with prisoners of conscience, including Aung San Suu Kyi, told the Guardian.

"China can show its strength to the world and its security in its own governance by not being afraid of one man who has dared repeatedly to stand up to the one party system," he added.

"I hope and pray that we can succeed. We don't have a lot of time quite clearly, so it is going to be a very difficult challenge. But I hope that President Xi will see that it's in China interests to not be viewed as not only silencing a man but wilfully and intentionally shortening his life."

Patrick Poon, another Amnesty International activist, said Chinese authorities could no longer justify preventing Liu from leaving China. "China will forever be criticised for its cruelty to the Nobel laureate if it still denies his wish to leave the country."

Ye Du, a poet and friend, said Liu's wishes needed to be urgently respected. "However, what is most likely to happen is that Liu Xiaobo will die in the hospital because of the Communist party's constant authoritarian stance."

The calls for Liu's complete release came after a family friend said Liu had told the foreign doctors he wished to leave China and supporters renewed their appeal for the dissident to be allowed a final taste of freedom.

Liu's former lawyer and friend, Shang Baojun, told the Associated Press the dissident had expressed his desire "to go abroad for treatment, preferably in Germany, though the US would also be fine, and his family members said the same" [4].

On Saturday Liu's friends and supporters repeated their call for Beijing to grant the campaigner "his last wish" by allowing him to leave China.

In an open letter drafted by his friend [5], the activist Ai Xiaoming, supporters said it was "abundantly clear" that the Chinese hospital where Liu was being held had exhausted its treatment options. As a result he should be allowed to seek treatment abroad, the group argued.

"Even though Liu Xiaobo is still a prisoner of this country, even though he's nearing his death, his heart is still beating and his soul longs for freedom. He has made the final choice for his life: leave this prison and experience freedom," the group wrote.

Xi, who has overseen what observers call China's most severe crackdown since 1989 [6], is facing international censure over his government's treatment of Liu, who was arrested in December 2008 for his involvement in a pro-democracy manifesto called Charter 08 [7] and later jailed for 11 years [8]. The manifesto called, among other things, for an end to one-party rule.

Jean-Philippe Béja, a French academic who has known Liu for 25 years, condemned China's treatment of his friend in recent months as "terrible and illogical".

Béja said the international community had failed to sufficiently "shame the Chinese leadership" over its treatment of a peaceful democracy activist who had spent almost a quarter of his life behind bars for defending his ideas.

"The guy is going to die ... [perhaps] in the next month or two," Béja said. "People should realise: what kind of a regime can do that to someone who just wrote articles? I think we should ponder over this situation."

Tom Phillips in Beijing

Additional reporting by Wang Zhen

P.S.

* The Guardian. Sunday 9 July 2017 11.05 BST First published on Sunday 9 July 2017 04.21 BST:
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/09/liu-xiaobo-tells-foreign-doctors-he-wants-to-leave-china-for-treatment>

Footnotes

[1] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/26/outpouring-of-anger-as-chinese-nobel-laureate-released-from-prison>

[2] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/27/us-joins-growing-calls-for-china-to-allow-liu-xiaobo-cancer-treatment-abroad>

[3] <https://www.mdanderson.org/newsroom/2017/07/recommendation-for-the-further-treatment-of-chinese-nobel-prize-.html>

[4] http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/A/AS_CHINA_JAILED_NOBEL_LAUREATE?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT

[5] https://twitter.com/ai_xiaoming/status/883853070001741826

[6] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/03/human-rights-activist-peter-dahlin-secret-black-prison-xi-jinpings-new-china>

[7] <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2009/01/15/chinas-charter-08/>

[8] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/dec/25/china-jails-liu-xiaobo>