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TIBET ACTIVISTS IN BEIJING STAGE SYMBOLIC PROTEST NEAR BIRD'S NEST STADIUM ONE HOUR BEFORE OPENING CEREMONY BEGINS

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****Photos and video footage of the action and the activists' bios available at:
<http://freetibet2008.org/mediacenter/updates/teamtibetflags/>*

****Journal of Team Tibet Flag Protest by Douglas F. Herman, Board Member of ITIM who was on the scene in Beijing, is available at <http://journals.worldnomads.com/dherman>*

Beijing – Three Tibet supporters staged a symbolic protest near the entrance to the Olympic Park and the Bird's Nest stadium in Beijing today, August 8th, one hour before the Olympic opening ceremony began. The three displayed Tibetan national flags. Chinese security tackled them 40 seconds after the protest began. Jonathan Stribling-Uss, 27, and Kalaya'an Mendoza, 29, Americans, and Cesar Pablo Maxit, 32, an Argentine-American, were immediately and forcibly detained.

“These activists have delivered a message of solidarity with the Tibetan people, highlighting the grave situation in Tibet just moments before the Beijing Olympics began,” said Lhadon Tethong, Executive Director of Students for a Free Tibet. “The Chinese government wants the world to be dazzled and distracted by the grandeur of the opening ceremony, but its true face can be seen in its ruthless and intensifying repression of the Tibetan people.”

The area surrounding the Olympic Park was partitioned off and highly patrolled. “Even around noon time it was impossible to get within the equivalent of a major city avenue of the park due to the increase in security,” stated Douglas F. Herman, a Board Member of the American-based International Tibet Independence Movement (ITIM), who was on the scene of the protest. “Once I emerged from the subway line in at the Beitucheng stop, I felt surrounded by officers with automatic weapons, uniformed policemen, and dozens of plain clothed police. It was an unbelievably tense scene.”

Tibetan imagery is expected to be a feature of the Chinese government's Olympic propaganda message at tonight's opening ceremony. However, the Tibetan national flag the three activists each held up outside the subway entrance to the park is considered illegal by Chinese authorities, and Tibetan Monks who brandished their national emblem during peaceful protests in March were arrested and detained indefinitely for similar actions. “Doing what these three activists did has led to serious physical and legal consequences for Tibetans and Chinese for years now,” said Mr. Herman who came to Beijing to report on the way such protests would be handled by the authorities. “These people were tackled and beaten to the ground simply for holding out flags and wearing Team Tibet T-shirts. It is unbelievable to see how they are being treated considering the foundational Olympic precepts of solidarity, unity and world peace. While the world gets ready to celebrate over a thousand Monks and Nuns are missing and hundreds others have been imprisoned, relocated, tortured and even killed as a result of their refusal to accept Chinese occupation of Tibet.”

Tibet support organizations around the globe have planned demonstrations at Chinese embassies and consulates today to highlight the Chinese government's attempt to use the Olympics to legitimize its rule in Tibet and call on the Chinese leadership to meaningfully address the issue of Tibet. Tibet groups are planning ongoing protests and events for the duration of the Beijing Games, from Santiago to Montevideo, New York to Toronto, London to Warsaw, Delhi to Brisbane, and many more.

Earlier this week, four members of Students for a Free Tibet hung two banners from lampposts outside the Bird's Nest Olympic Stadium. The two Americans and two Britons were detained after unfurling a banner reading "One World, One Dream: Free Tibet" and another reading "Tibet Will Be Free" in English and "Free Tibet" in Chinese. They were swiftly deported and arrived in their home countries on August 7th (press releases available at <http://freetibet2008.org/mediacenter/>).

Students for a Free Tibet (SFT) is a network of young people and activists campaigning for Tibet's independence, with 700 chapters in more than thirty countries worldwide. SFT's international headquarters are in New York, with offices in Toronto, London, and Dharamsala, India.

The International Tibet Independence Movement (ITIM) was co-founded in 1995 by Taktser Rinpoche (Oldest brother of His Holiness The XIVth Dalai Lama), and Professor Larry Gerstein to obtain Tibet's independence through non-violent methods. While ITIM is headquartered in Indiana, there are over 10,000 supporters of this organization worldwide.

About Douglas F. Herman: Board Member, International Tibet Independence Movement (ITIM). A native New Yorker, and recent M.A.T. graduate of the Center for Creative Teaching: Bennington College, VT, Douglas Herman is a practicing freelance photographer, filmmaker and writer. After spending six months traveling through Tibet and Tibetan Exile communities in Nepal, India and North America in 2002-03, he has continued to utilize his skills as a media artist and educator to increase global awareness of the absence of fundamental Human Rights and freedoms inside Tibet. He joined ITIM's Board in 2006.