

Lawyer linked to Nobel winner says barred from leaving China

Others too had been blocked to prevent them attending the Oslo prize ceremony. -AFP  
by Dan Martin

Tue, Nov 09, 2010  
AFP

BEIJING, Nov 9, 2010 (AFP) - A lawyer whose firm represents jailed Nobel Peace laureate Liu Xiaobo said he was stopped from leaving China on Tuesday and that others had been blocked to prevent them attending the Oslo prize ceremony.

The news comes amid a wider crackdown on government critics in the wake of the announcement of Liu's Nobel win on October 8, which has seen activists and dissidents taken into custody or placed under various restrictions.

Lawyer Mo Shaoping told AFP that immigration officials had stopped him at Beijing's airport, where he had intended to board a flight to take him to a lawyers' conference in London.

"They said it was because I may do something to harm national interests," said Mo, the head of the law firm that has defended Liu.

The prominent rights lawyer added "there have been many others" prevented from leaving the country recently, apparently out of fear one of them would seek to accept the award on Liu's behalf at the December 10 ceremony in Norway.

Mo - who was travelling with activist law professor He Weifang - said he had no plans to go to Norway and that officials did not specifically cite the Nobel as a reason for denying him the right to travel.

"But it is definitely because of that," he said.

Liu, 54, was sentenced to 11 years in prison last December on subversion charges after co-authoring a petition calling for political reform in China, which was widely circulated online and signed by thousands including Mo and He.

The choice has enraged China's rulers, who have denounced the Nobel Committee, said the prize was tantamount to "encouraging crime" and placed Liu's wife Liu Xia under house arrest.

She issued an open letter last month inviting more than 100 of her husband's friends and supporters to go to receive the award on his behalf in Oslo next month.

Diplomats last week said China's embassy in Oslo had sent letters to Western missions more or less implicitly cautioning them not to attend the prize ceremony in the Norwegian capital.

Vice Foreign Minister Cui Tiankai said governments would have to "take responsibility for the consequences" if they showed support for Liu, according to Dow Jones Newswires.

The United States, France, Australia and others have praised Liu for the Nobel honour and called for his immediate release.

Liu has been defended by lawyers Shang Baojun and Ding Xikui, associates at the firm run by Mo.

"My trip has nothing to do with the Nobel prize," Mo said. "Lots of people were going to this conference. I have been planning it for weeks."

Norway-based ambassadors are traditionally invited to attend the ceremony in Oslo city hall along with royalty and other stars, and the Chinese warnings do not appear to have dissuaded many of them from attending.

Chinese activist writer Dai Qing, who is currently on a trip abroad, and some Hong Kong pro-democracy legislators are among those who have said they were formulating plans to attend the ceremony.

The Chinese Human Rights Defenders, a coalition of activists inside and outside the country, denounced the crackdown on Liu's friends and supporters.

"The scope and intensity of this harassment indicates a high-level decision to take a hard-line approach in response to the Nobel Committee's choice," the group's international director Renee Xia said in a statement Monday.

Liu is serving his sentence in a prison in northeastern China.