

Golden Pen of Freedom to be presented in Cape Town

Shi Tao, the Chinese journalist who was imprisoned after Yahoo provided information to the Chinese authorities that led to his arrest, has been awarded the 2007 Golden Pen of Freedom, the annual press freedom prize of the World Association of Newspapers (WAN), to be presented at the World Newspaper Congress and World Editors Forum next year in Cape Town, South Africa, on 4 June, 2007.

WAN, the global association of the newspaper industry, has awarded the Golden Pen annually since 1961. Past winners include Argentina's Jacobo Timerman (1980), **South Africa's Anthony Heard (1986)**, China's Dai Qing (1992), Vietnam's Doan Viet Hoat (1998), Zimbabwe's Geoffrey Nyarota (2002), and Sudan's Mahjoub Mohamed Salih (2005). The 2006 winner was journalist Akbar Ganji of Iran.

Press freedom

WAN, which defends and promotes press freedom world-wide, represents 18 000 newspapers. Its membership includes 73 national newspaper associations, newspaper companies and individual newspaper executives in 102 countries, 11 news agencies and nine regional and world-wide press groups.

Chinese journalist Shi is serving a 10-year sentence on charges of "leaking state secrets" for writing an email about media restrictions in the run-up to the 15th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre in 2004.

The email was picked up by several overseas Internet portals -- and also by Chinese authorities, with the assistance of Yahoo. The Internet service provider gave state security authorities details of Shi's email usage that ultimately allowed them to trace the message to a computer he used at the newspaper where he worked, the *Dangdai Shang Bao* (Contemporary Business News).

Local law

When asked about Yahoo's involvement at the time of Shi's arrest, Yahoo co-founder Jerry Yang defended the company's involvement by saying: "To be doing business in China, or anywhere else in the world, we have to comply with local law."

Shi distributed information that had been sent to his newspaper by the Chinese authorities, warning journalists of the dangers of "social destabilisation" and risks linked to the return of certain dissidents to China for the commemoration of the massacre, in which democracy supporters, mostly students, were brutally gunned down by Chinese troops on 4 June 1989.

Largest jailer of journalists

He is one of dozens of journalists and cyber-dissidents in prison in China, the world's largest jailer of journalists.

The Golden Pen award recognises Mr Shi's outstanding defence and promotion of press freedom.

"The jailing of Mr Shi is an outrage. It is also a sad example of a western company aiding and abetting repression in the belief that to refuse would harm its activities in the country," said the board of the Paris-based WAN, at a recent meeting in Kiev, Ukraine.

Support freedom of expression

"As a major media company that commands the world's attention, Yahoo has an obligation to take the lead in support of freedom of expression on the Internet. Yahoo should be sending a message to repressive regimes that they will be left behind if they continue to take information hostage, jail journalists and deprive their citizens of the right to open debate. Quite the reverse happened in this case."

The board has called for the immediate release of Shi and other imprisoned Chinese journalists.

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