

## China detains activists as Barack Obama arrives

Written by Taipei Times

Tuesday, 17 November 2009 07:17 -

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Police detained dozens of activists and petitioners in Beijing and elsewhere in China as US President Barack Obama arrived on his first state visit to the country, friends, family members and a human rights group said yesterday.

International rights groups have urged Obama to raise human rights concerns during a four-day trip to China that began on Sunday night and will include a meeting with Chinese President Hu Jintao (胡锦涛). China frequently conducts crackdowns on dissent ahead of major events, such as last year's Olympics and this year's National Day celebrations.

Activist Zhao Lianhai (赵连海), who organized an online support group for parents whose children were sickened by tainted milk last year, was taken away by police from his home late on Friday night, his wife Li Xuemei (李雪梅) said.

Officers also confiscated his computers and other equipment during the raid. Li said they returned the following day with documents for her to sign that said Zhao had been "criminally detained" for "provoking an incident."

Chen Jianfang, a petitioner from Shanghai who traveled to Beijing with 200 others, said the group wanted to welcome Obama and draw his attention to China's human rights violations. But several dozen of her companions were rounded up by Beijing police when they arrived at the government's petition office yesterday, she said.

"They are detaining people everywhere, even if they are only petitioning normally at the state petition office and are not holding any banners or shouting any slogans," she said.

Chen said that most of the petitioners have had their homes destroyed and their land taken away without getting fair compensation.

A Hong Kong-based rights group said that more than a dozen activists in Beijing, Shanghai and elsewhere in the country had been detained or placed under house arrest in a bid to muffle their criticism during Obama's visit.

The activists were openly warned against "making trouble" during Obama's visit, China Human Rights Defenders said.

In a statement, the group urged Obama to raise concerns about the practice during his upcoming meetings with Chinese leaders, and to demand the immediate release of those detained in connection with his visit.

Source: [Taipei Times 2009/11/17](#)