

PRC charges activist with subversion

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Leading Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo (刘小波) has been formally indicted for subversion, his family and a rights group said yesterday, one year after he was detained in the wake of signing a pro--democracy charter.

“His lawyer told me Friday that Liu Xiaobo has been formally charged with inciting subversion of state power,” his wife Liu Xia (刘霞) said.

“I was mentally prepared for an indictment, but I wasn’t expecting the prosecutors to move so quickly,” she said by telephone.

“This doesn’t look hopeful for him,” she said. “But he will certainly fight the charges.”

The 53-year-old writer, who was involved in the 1989 Tiananmen pro-democracy protests, was arrested last December after signing Charter 08, a widely circulated petition that called for greater democracy in China.

Liu’s lawyer, Shang Baojun (尚宝军), said on Wednesday that Liu’s case had been transferred by police to prosecutors with a recommendation he be indicted.

China Human Rights Defenders (CHRD) said Liu’s case would be heard by Beijing No. 1 Intermediate People’s Court, though a date has yet to be set.

“After holding Liu Xiaobo over one year without a trial, officials have now sped up prosecution and we worry that they will rush the case through trial procedures during the holiday season,” said Jiang Yingying, a researcher for the rights group.

“We are seriously concerned that Liu will not get a fair and open trial, and his legal rights will not be respected,” he said.

China’s Party-controlled courts rarely find in favor of defendants, especially in politically charged cases.

If convicted, the 53-year-old dissident could be sentenced to up to 15 years in prison. Police have said the charges against Liu are “serious,” suggesting authorities will seek a long term.

The group condemned Liu’s indictment and called for his immediate and unconditional release.

“Liu Xiaobo is being punished solely for the peaceful activities of expressing his opinions and organizing fellow citizens to voice their common concerns and ideas regarding the promotion of human rights and democracy,” CHRD said.

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The indictment is likely to draw fresh outcries over a case that has already become a focus for international pressure on China, which has bolstered controls on critics of Chinese Communist Party rule.

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