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Dear Members of the Nobel Peace Prize Committee:

I am writing as the Laurance S. Rockefeller University Professor of Philosophy and the University Center for Human Values at Princeton University and as President of PEN American Center to nominate Dr. Liu Xiaobo of China for the Nobel Peace Prize.

You are no doubt familiar with Liu Xiaobo's immediate circumstances. On December 25, 2009, when the Chinese government believed that the world would not be paying attention, a Beijing court sentenced Liu to 11 years in prison and an additional two years' deprivation of political rights for "inciting subversion of state power." This so-called incitement, the verdict made clear, consisted of seven phrases—a total of 224 Chinese characters—that he had written over the last three years. I have attached a list of these phrases, which appeared in six essays and in Charter 08, a declaration modeled on Vaclav Havel's Charter 77 that calls for political reform and greater human rights in China and has been signed, at considerable risk, by more than 10,000 Chinese citizens.

You are also surely familiar with Liu Xiaobo's long history as one of the leading proponents of peaceful democratic reform in the People's Republic of China. A poet and a literary critic, Liu served as a professor at Beijing Normal University and was a leading voice and an influential presence during the student protests in Tiananmen Square in 1989; indeed, his insistence on non-violence and democratic process are widely credited with preventing far more catastrophic bloodshed during the subsequent crackdown.

Even after spending nearly two years in prison for his role in the Tiananmen protests, Liu Xiaobo continued to speak and write in favor of freedom of expression and democracy. He spent an additional three years in a reeducation-through-labor camp beginning in 1996 for publicly questioning the role of the single-party system and calling for dialogue between the Chinese government and the Dalai Lama of Tibet, and was regularly detained, harassed, and surveilled until his most recent arrest in December 2008.

Along with my duties as a professor at Princeton University, I am also currently serving as President of PEN American Center, as I mentioned at the start; and in submitting this nomination of Liu Xiaobo I am particularly proud to note that Liu Xiaobo is not only a colleague of mine in the world of letters, but also, more particularly, a PEN colleague. Liu has been a leading figure in the Independent Chinese PEN Center (ICPC), our sister center, whose 250 members are doing courageous, on-the-ground advocacy work for freedom of expression in China despite constant pressure from Chinese authorities. Liu served as President of ICPC from 2003 to 2007, held seat a on its Board until late 2009, and is currently serving as Honorary President. Since ICPC was formed in 2001, it has emerged as a leading source of information

about threats to writers and journalists and an important voice for freedom of expression in China, and it has come under increased pressure for its activities. Its meetings have been interrupted and canceled by authorities, its officers and members are regularly subject to intimidation and surveillance, and many have been detained and questioned about the center's activities. Liu Xiaobo is one of six PEN members currently in prison in China.

In addition to Liu's distinguished and principled leadership in the area of human and political rights and freedom of expression, there are many reasons why I believe Liu Xiaobo merits selection as the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize Recipient.

Liu's writings express the aspirations of a growing number of China's citizens; the ideas he has articulated in his allegedly subversive writings, ideas that are commonplace in free societies around the world, are shared by a significant cross section of Chinese society. Charter 08, for example, is a testament to an expanding movement for peaceful political reform in China. This document, which Liu co-authored, is a remarkable attempt both to engage China's leadership and to speak to the Chinese public about where China is and needs to go. It is novel in its breadth and in its list of signers—not only dissidents and human rights lawyers, but also prominent political scientists, economists, writers, artists, grassroots activists, farmers, and even government officials. More than 10,000 Chinese citizens have endorsed the document despite the fact that almost all of the original 300 signers have since been detained or harassed. In doing so they, too, exhibited exceptional courage and conviction. One of them, for example, a teacher in Yunnan province, reported that police contacted her three times asking her to renounce the Charter and proclaim the signer was some other person with the same name. She refused. To stand up for Liu Xiaobo is to stand with a growing number of men and women like her in China; to stand with all those who advocate for peaceful change in the world's most populous nation.

In fact, Liu Xiaobo is the kind of figure governments suppress at their peril. While he was a young university professor, Liu was a major protagonist in the final days of the Tiananmen Square protests, and, as I have already said, he is widely credited with preventing far greater bloodshed when government troops moved into the square. Liu admonished the students to make their own movement more democratic; he disarmed a group of workers who appeared with guns to protect the student demonstrators (there is stirring news footage of him seizing a rifle and smashing it at a Tiananmen rally shortly before the crackdown); and he helped persuade students to evacuate the square in the final hours. Deeply committed to non-violence and democracy, Liu has been able both to articulate and to channel the frustrations of the Chinese people for more than two decades. Stifling such a voice does nothing to address those frustrations, which one way or another will eventually find expression. China has, indeed, moved increasingly towards democracy and freedom in the last few decades.

The numbers of those imprisoned in China for exercising their right to free expression guaranteed to them by international human rights law was once in the thousands, if not tens of thousands: today we can identify only a few score such prisoners in the name of free expression. There are voices within the regime, we know, urging greater respect for free expression. China wants—and needs—to be heard in the community of nations. I—and all of my PEN colleagues—believe in a cosmopolitan conversation in which we hear from every nation. But the world must let China's rulers know that we can only listen respectfully if they offer to their own citizens the fundamental freedoms we all claim from our governments. This is the right moment for the world to show those in China who do not understand that history is on freedom's side that all the world's friends of peace and democracy are watching. No signal of this would be more powerful than the award of the Nobel Peace Prize.

Over the years, the Nobel Committee has had a distinguished record of recognizing and honoring just such voices at just such critical moments. Liu Xiaobo stands in the company of Andrei Sakharov, Shirin Ebadi, and Dr. Martin Luther King, brave proponents of civil and political rights who have stood up to systematic repression in their own countries and practiced principled, non-violent resistance to bad laws and policies. In fact, the year before my countryman Dr. King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, he wrote in his seminal letter from a Birmingham jail, “An individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for the law.” Ten days after Liu Xiaobo was sentenced, he was able to release a statement through his lawyers. In it, he echoed Dr. King when he declared, “For an intellectual thirsty for freedom in a dictatorial country, prison is the very first threshold. Now I have stepped over the threshold, and freedom is near.”

It is likely that the Chinese government will want to argue, as indeed it already has, that their treatment of Liu Xiaobo is an internal matter, and that international awards and advocacy on his behalf amount to meddling in China’s internal affairs. But in fact, as PEN American Center noted in a letter to Chinese President Hu Jintao following Liu’s conviction, the treatment he has endured is by definition an international matter, just as all violations of human rights are matters of legitimate concern to the whole world. By detaining Liu Xiaobo for more than a year, and then by convicting and sentencing him to 11 years in prison in clear violation of his most fundamental, internationally-recognized rights, the People’s Republic of China itself has guaranteed that his case is not and cannot be a purely internal affair. China’s citizens should be concerned that Liu Xiaobo was denied rights enshrined in the Chinese constitution; all of us have a right to express our concern that he was denied rights guaranteed in international treaties to which China is a signatory.

Human rights are the legitimate concern of all human beings. That principle was established firmly in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Liu Xiaobo is one of some 45 writers currently imprisoned in China in violation of Article 19 of the UDHR and the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, and honoring him with the Nobel Peace Prize would be a powerful way to underscore the fact that the rights that are enshrined in international human rights law—values that China has acknowledged and endorsed—are the non-negotiable entitlements of every man and woman.

This is a message that the Chinese government needs to hear, more urgently than ever. If Liu Xiaobo’s case demonstrates anything, it is that Chinese authorities are now operating with a sense of impunity, convinced that they can stifle dissent and control the flow of information and ideas in their country without significant domestic or international repercussions. In the long run, of course, they will be proven wrong. But in the short term, there is every reason to worry about how many others will be silenced or suppressed if the world fails to make clear it stands with Liu Xiaobo. Just two weeks ago, I learned that Zhao Shiyong, the Secretary General of the Independent Chinese PEN Center, had been detained, quite possibly because he has been a vocal critic of his government’s treatment of Liu Xiaobo. That he was released two weeks later gives me hope that the Chinese authorities are aware that the world is watching.

If China can jail Liu Xiaobo without repercussions, it isn’t just dissident voices inside China that are vulnerable. A feature of China’s ascendancy on the world stage has been its implicit agreement with rights-abusing regimes in other nations that it will turn a blind eye to

even the most blatant human rights violations in exchange for preferred commercial relations. The courageous men and women who are challenging tyranny in these countries are looking to the governments and leading non-governmental institutions in free countries for assurances that their fate, and the fate of their countries, depends on something more than the bottom line. To fail to challenge the Chinese government on Liu Xiaobo's imprisonment is to concede this argument internationally, at enormous peril to peaceful advocates of progress and change not just in China but all around the world. Awarding Liu Xiaobo the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize, by contrast, would both honor Dr. Liu's unique and indispensable contributions to the movement for greater civil, political, and human rights in China and serve as sustenance and inspiration to present and future rights activists in China and in every nation.

While I decided, after consultation with my colleagues at PEN, to write in support of Liu Xiaobo's nomination some time ago, I am delighted to see that a number of leading intellectuals from other countries, including some eminent Nobel Laureates, have done so already.

I am attaching a few materials that I hope will prove helpful in evaluating this nomination: letters on Liu's behalf from PEN American Center to President Obama and President Hu Jintao, and a letter in support of this nomination endorsed by some of my most eminent colleagues in the United States. I hope these are helpful. I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to commend Liu Xiaobo to you, and I look forward, as always, to your decision.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Appiah', written in a cursive style.

Kwame Anthony Appiah
Professor