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Chinese Activists Seek Approval of Rights Treaty

Written by Olivia Rosenman

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New Internet letter calls for China to sign International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

Chinese activists have circulated the third letter in three months, calling on the government to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as the once in a decade power handover in China wrapped up over the weekend.

Activists are making the most of a sensitive time in Chinese politics, as the new government takes over and is

making promises for China's future. The letter, circulated on the Internet, demonstrates the increasing awareness and agitation among Chinese people to have their rights guaranteed under the rule of law.



A brave one signs.

A series of posts combined under the title *National People's Congress, have you heard the citizens' voices?* show photographs of activists signing the open letter along with receipts from the registered mail service used to send them to the Congress. According to the dates marked on the receipts, the letters should have arrived during the final days of the Congress's meeting. The petition has 101 signatures, including Xiao Shu - a journalist who was forced to leave the Southern Weekly newspaper in 2011 after his reports and commentaries offended government censors, Dong Xiaohua - the retired executive of a state owned enterprise in Guangzhou, Dong Rubin - a well-known blogger, and Liu Shahe - a Chinese literature expert.

The posts appeared on a Taiwanese-hosted blog "Citizens' Petition." Dong Rubin also posted on the photos on his Sina Weibo blog, accompanied by the text:

"On this occasion of the convocation of the 12th National People's Congress, on behalf of the citizens

of the People's Republic of China, cautiously I sign this petition calling on the government to ratify the ICCPR and send it by express post to the National People's Congress Standing Committee. Please support the people's petition. Write letters and share this post."

The post has since been deleted.

This follows on from a letter in late February, just days before the NPC and CPCC convened, which also called for ratification of the international covenant. That letter was signed by eminent Chinese intellectuals including the Three Gorges activist, Dai Qing, investigative journalist Wang Keqin, Pu Zhiqiang – a civil rights lawyer and Mao Yushi – an economist renowned for his criticism of Mao Zedong's policies.

China signed up to the ICCPR in 1998, but has yet to ratify it. The ICCPR is a UN treaty which covers human rights such as freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom of association and the right to a fair trial. Chinese state leaders have pledged at least three times over the last decade that ratification was imminent. In 2008, more than 300 Chinese intellectuals and activists signed Charter 08, which eventually saw its initiator Liu Xiaobo arrested for inciting subversion of the state. Despite international pressure, Liu has remained in prison ever since, his wife Liu Xia has been held under strict house arrest.

In his first press conference as the country's new premier, Li Keqiang spoke of "building a modern economy, modern society and modern government with the spirit of the rule of law". The conference lasted two hours, in which Li made a variety of pledges including addressing environmental problems, food safety issues, and sustaining economic growth. He did not mention the international covenant, nor the recent calls for the government to ratify it.

In Xi Jinping's final address to the congress on Sunday, he spoke of the "renaissance of the Chinese nation," but his comments were largely restricted to committing to achieve this through stable economic growth and raising the quality of life.

(Olivia Rosenman is a master's in journalism candidate at Hong Kong University)