

**President Hu Jintao**  
**President of the People's Republic of China**  
Yongdingmenjie, Beijing 100032  
People's Republic of China

Your Excellency,

I am writing to express my grave concern regarding the imprisonment of petitioner and women's rights defender Mao Hengfeng, who was convicted of intentional damage of property on January 12, 2007, and sentenced to two-and-a-half years' imprisonment. Mao Hengfeng's conviction results from her steadfast refusal to cease demanding justice both for herself and for other petitioners.

Mao Hengfeng's sentence is disproportionate to her convicted offense. She broke two lamps and other items while in custody, and her lawyers have disputed the value of these items attributed to them at trial, as well as the validity of other major evidence used. I believe that the heavy sentence levied against Mao Hengfeng is a means to silence her and punish her for invoking her lawful right to petition the government. Mao's exaggerated sentence is part of a worrying trend of a crackdown on petitioners that indicates that the authorities are willing to bend the law in order to silence the dissenting voices of the powerless and the wronged. Furthermore, while in detention, Mao, like other petitioners, has been subjected to cruel and humiliating treatment and abuse.

I therefore urge the government to immediately and unconditionally release Mao Hengfeng and others detained for peacefully invoking their lawful rights to petition. Their right to freedom of expression and to criticize the government is protected both in the Chinese Constitution and international law.

Sincerely,