



House members hope Bush discusses prisoner with China

By Bill Nichols
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WASHINGTON -- When President Bush meets Chinese President Hu Jintao on Sunday during a summit in Evian-les-Bains, France, 40 members of Congress hope he'll mention two words: Yang Jianli.

Yang, a pro-democracy activist from the Boston area, was detained in Beijing in April 2002. His supporters concede he entered China on an illegal passport because he had been barred from his homeland. But for the past 13 months, he has not been allowed to meet with his lawyers or his family, has received no hearing and has not been charged with any crime. "No one has seen him," says Yang's wife, Christina Fu, a researcher at the Harvard Medical School.

As of Thursday, 40 members of the House of Representatives were co-sponsoring a resolution calling for Yang's release. Administration officials say no decision has been made about whether Bush will address Yang's case with Hu.

Yang's case also has a larger significance for the Bush administration because some human rights groups and members of Congress are complaining that the U.S. effort to win support for the Iraq war has diminished the focus on human rights abuses in countries such as China.

Yang's congressman, Massachusetts Democrat Barney Frank, says the U.S. treatment of prisoners detained on suspicion of terrorism -- many of whom also have been held without charges or hearings -- has eroded the administration's human rights credibility. "When the Chinese hold him indefinitely," Frank says, "it's not all that much different from what (Attorney General) John Ashcroft has done."

The intense focus on fighting terrorism by the United States and other Western powers is leading to an overall "increase in human rights abuses," Amnesty International said in its annual report Wednesday.

State Department spokesman Richard Boucher defends U.S. policies. He said the administration "remains strongly committed to its longstanding human rights policies, both at home and abroad." Fu and her husband's lawyer, Jared Genser, say that in Yang's case, the State Department has worked hard to secure his release. A permanent U.S. resident, Yang initially was held for entering the country illegally, but now he's also being investigated on suspicion of being a spy for Taiwan, according to Sun Weide, a spokesman for the Chinese Embassy in Washington.

Fu says that her husband gained admittance with a friend's passport, but that the maximum penalty in China for illegal entry is a year, which Yang has served. Yang's legal team says any suggestion he is a spy is false.