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Olympic gold – at what price?

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INSIGHT

Olympic Gold – At what price?

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On September 15, 2006 an Associated Press article was circulated, reporting on an article in the Beijing Morning Post which noted that the city was "considering hospitalizing all mentally ill people to avoid creating any harm to the city" (1) during the 2008 Olympics, as well as considering other measures such as expelling many of the city's migrant workers, limiting the use of cars and banning the posting of hand bills, shutting down heavily polluting factories and giving many of their residents an extended holiday during the games. Subsequently, On September 27th, AP reported that Chinese officials had denied the plans to expel migrant workers, but were "considering how to keep the mentally ill from damaging the public interest during the Games." (2). In that article Zhou Jidong, the head of the city government's legal department, was quoted as saying that "the city government plans to ask the municipal (council) to make a law about psychiatric health regulations aimed at providing mental health treatment and preventing mentally ill people from damaging the public interest".

Although it is probably not surprising that people with mental illness are seen as requiring control, and that hospitalizing all such individuals is under consideration in China in preparation for the Olympics (despite statements to the effect that the Olympics would help further human rights in China), it is more disturbing to see the response outside of China. One of Canada's leading newspapers, the Globe and Mail, picked up the original AP story the next day and ran it as a small item in the sports section with the headline noting that China planned to limit the use of cars in Beijing during the Olympics. Only in the body of the story was there a brief note about the plans to hospitalize those with mental illness. It seems, in Canada at least, that the news that car use will be limited is seen as more news worthy than the violation of the human rights of a vast group of people with mental illness.

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References:

1. Associated Press Archive, September 15, 2006.

2.Associated Press Archive, September 27, 2006

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