

Harnessing Human Rights to the Olympic Games: Human Rights Watch and the 1993 'Stop Beijing' Campaign



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BACKGROUND, FRAMEWORK AND CONTEXT

- 1993 → post cold war
- **CHINA IS RISING POWER** – one-fifth of the world's population, a booming economy, a government eager to boost its international standing.
- 1989 collapse of communist rule in eastern Europe
- 1989 Tiananmen square massacre → China suddenly draws prime attention from human rights groups

**HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY NEEDED NEW AUDIENCES
AND NEW MEDIA-FRIENDLY MESSAGES.**



SINO - US RELATIONS:

LOVE-HATE Relationship

'when things are going well with China, and China is being good, Americans think China is wonderful. It's all panda bears, and rosy-cheeked kindergarten children . . . And then when China does something bad, like Tiananmen, then China can do no right. There is this overwhelming desire . . . to somehow punish and correct China'

- after the Tiananmen events, the U.S. government suspended military sales to Beijing and froze relations.
- Dominant US emotions toward China → hostility, indignation and disgust.
- At the same time China had the '*most favored nation*' trading status.



THE 'STORY'

In 1993 the IOC needed to choose the host country for the 2000 Olympic Games.

- 6 bidders → Istanbul, Sydney, Beijing, Manchester, Berlin, and Brasilia

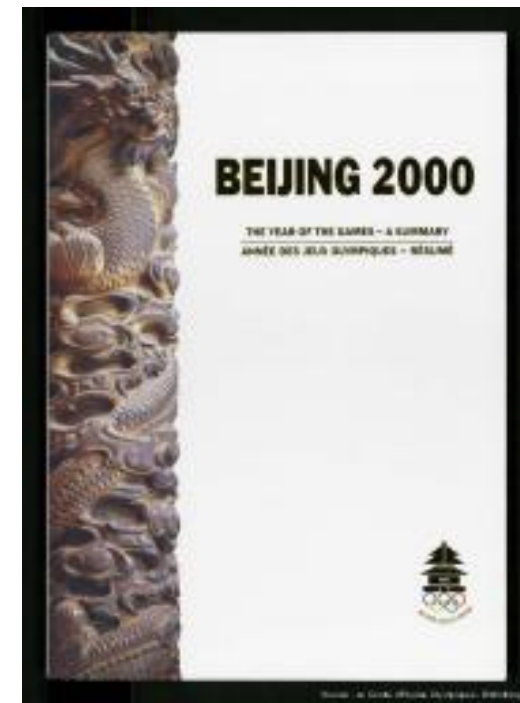


BEIJING 2000

China's leaders saw the 2000 Olympics as:

- a way to cement the country's status as a global power at the beginning of the new millennium
- A way to repair the reputational damage inflicted by the Tiananmen Square massacre.

The regime treated the IOC vote as a referendum on China's status as a great power.



THE 'STOP BEIJING CAMPAIGN'

The HRW- Human Rights Watch launched a major campaign to derail Beijing's bid on human rights grounds.

The Chinese regime underestimated the continuing strength of Western feelings about 1989 (Tiananmen square massacre).

China was unprepared for the human rights outcry its Olympic bid provoked.

The HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH and its place in 1993

One of the most influential human rights organization in the world

Internal upheaval wrought by a post-Cold War enlargement of its ambitions, staff numbers, and scope

Dependent on four major funders that measured impact in terms of headlines

'a culture in which one's success is measured in large part by the number of inches one gets in The New York Times'

Revenue shortfall → looking for media attention and funding from publicity.



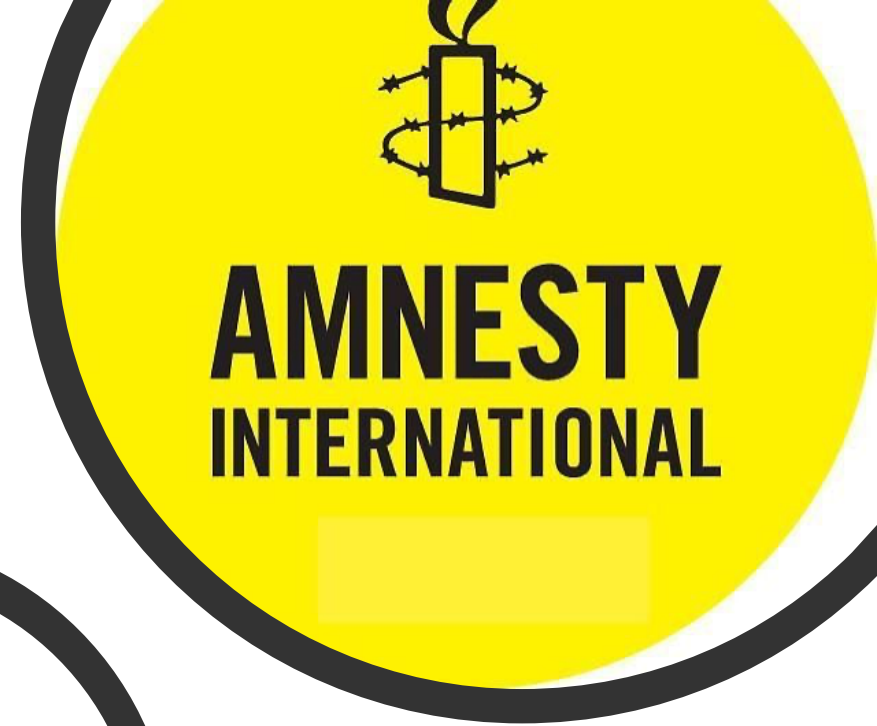
MAIN ARGUMENT

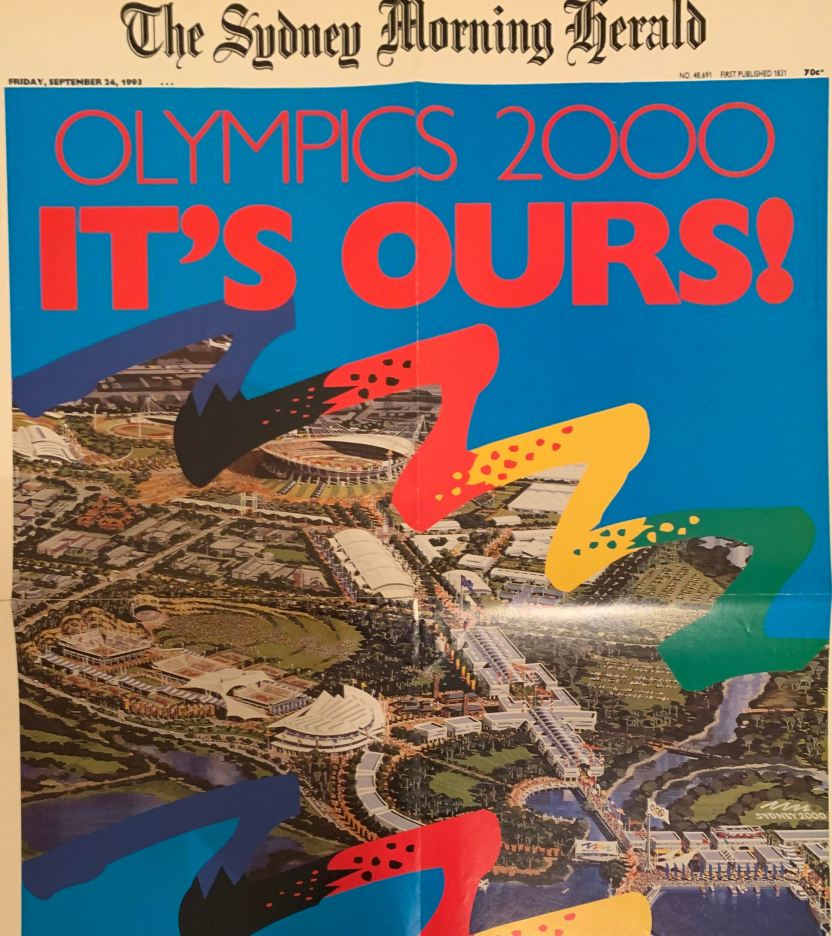
HRW's campaign:

- part of a larger story of Western anxieties about the rise of China and the recasting of human rights after the Cold War
- stemmed from its new post-Cold War focus on China combined with the organization's search for new ways to secure media attention and the funding that flowed from publicity
- large unintended and negative consequences for Sino–US relations (powerful anti-US backlash in China)
- spurred popular enthusiasm for human rights in the West, BUT in a way that suggested that punishing abusers would achieve results (*opposite may have been true in this case*)

EXTERNAL POLITICAL PRESSURES

- European parliament
- US Congress – both House of Representatives and Senate
- Alliance for a Democratic China
- UK Foreign Minister Douglas Hurd
- the International Commission of Jurists
- Amnesty International





FINAL DECISION OF THE IOC

On 23 September 1993, 90 members of the IOC met in Monte Carlo to choose among Manchester, Istanbul, Berlin, Sydney, and Beijing.

Sydney won by 2 votes

Dicker (HRW staffer):



'It was impossible for the IOC to ignore China's egregious human rights record. This decision puts the Chinese leadership on notice that they will pay a price for the continued abuse of their own citizens'

INFLUENCING FACTORS

- Press
- Public opinion
- Emotional appeals
- States' own interests
- Sponsors and Avertizers



EVIDENCE

The author used a mix of various source types to support her article. Among those we find:

- Internal documentation from HRW
- US government documents
- IOC archives
- Newspapers (es. New York times, Washington Post, Toronto Star)
- Olympic charter
- Sydney bid committee records
- Interviews



CONCLUSION AND MY POV

I believe that

The article is :

- **Clear**
- **Well supported**
- **Agreeable**

the HRW campaign:

- **Influenced**
- **Is**
- **Shaped**
- **Transformed**
- **Widened**
- **Opened.**

Targeting China was not coincidental because :

- **popular target** of US ire
- **media appealing** cause
- **hot-button** issue in US politics

HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF...

- In 2022 China just hosted the winter olympics
- protests against Chinese human rights abuses, including Beijing's treatment of [Muslim Uighurs](#) in its western Xinjiang region
- Boycott by US and boycott threats by UK

NO HUMAN RIGHTS
NO BEIJING OLYMPICS

NO MORE
BLOODY
GAMES

NO BEIJING 2022





THANK YOU!
