China confirms dissident faces media ban

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CHINA has confirmed that prominent dissident Hu Jia is not allowed to give media interviews as a condition of his release from prison, and said he would be subject to "supervision".

In the first official comments about Hu's release at the weekend, foreign ministry spokesman Hong Lei said he faced "deprivation of political rights" - essentially a ban on political activities that typically bars media interviews.

One of China's leading rights activists and government critics, Hu returned to his Beijing home early on Sunday after completing a more than three-year sentence for subversion, his wife Zeng Jinyan said on Twitter.

Hu, 37, was jailed in April 2008, just months before the Beijing Olympics, after angering the ruling Communist Party through years of bold campaigning for civil rights, the environment and AIDS patients.

"Hu Jia is still in a situation where he is deprived of his political rights," Hong told reporters, without confirming the amount of time the condition would be in effect.

As such, Hu "cannot give interviews in the process and shall also be subject to supervision, administration and inspection from relevant departments in accordance with the law", he said.

Hu's wife had said he would be deprived of his political rights for a year. Chinese police have blocked access to his home, which indicates he will face restrictions on his movements and contacts.

His scheduled release came just days after outspoken artist Ai Weiwei returned to his home in the Chinese capital after nearly three months in police custody, amid a government crackdown on dissent.

In a phone interview with Hong Kong's Cable TV, Hu said he would like to resume his activism but is concerned about the impact that would have on his family.

He stressed the importance of "loyalty to morality, loyalty to the rights of citizens" but also said his relatives had encouraged him to "live an ordinary life" so as not to provoke the leadership in Beijing.

"I must try to console my parents and do what I can to console them... but I can only tell them I'll be careful," he added.

Hu is widely expected to be hit with the same strict curbs as those apparently applied to Ai and a range of other activists and rights lawyers, who seem to have been ordered to keep quiet after their release from custody.