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HEADLINE: 'Official' baby killing scandalizes Chinese: Resistance growing to the brutal enforcement of birth-control rules

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BODY: Even among a people used to harsh punishments for breaking China's birth-control rules, the murder of a baby by officials in the rural Hubei province has caused a scandal.

Amnesty International's citing of the case last week has highlighted a growing resistance to brutal methods. Amnesty says publication of the appalling details in three provincial newspapers was greeted with outrage.

A retired doctor had rescued the newborn child from the cesspit of a men's lavatory, where he had been tossed to die. Liu Juyu took the baby to a clinic, where she was confronted by five birth-control officials. Amnesty says they snatched the baby, threw him to the ground, kicked him and took him away to be drowned in a paddy field.

The child had been born in breach of local quotas enforced by the officials, who feared higher-level punishment if their targets were not met.

In another recent case, mass demonstrations were held in Changsha, Hunan province, after cadres tortured to death a man who would not reveal the whereabouts of his wife, who was believed to be pregnant.

Western diplomats point to a trend away from such brutality, but the population-control program may trigger tension between Beijing and U.S. President W. Bush's administration, which takes a strong "pro-life" stance. The United States is to decide whether to sponsor a resolution criticizing China at the United Nations Human Rights Commission meeting on March 19. Many reports, meanwhile, suggest the government faces pressure to punish officials who use threats, violence and extortion to enforce the rules.

China's population is said officially to have stabilized at 1.3 billion. But studies by population experts suggest about a third of births are not registered and there may be 100 million more.

Most rural Chinese are allowed two children, especially if the first is a girl. Only in the cities are couples limited to one. In most cases an extra child results in a fine or work sanctions, but wealthier people are able to have larger families.

An official document, the Guangdong Provincial Birth Control Regulation, illustrates that even a fairly moderate policy demands significant intrusion. For example, couples in state organizations need a committee's permission before they can have children. If they lack an allocation within the quota, they may not have children.

The document states for every extra child city-dwellers will be fined a sum equal to between 30 per cent and 50 per cent of the average annual income of local couples, calculated over seven years. The seven-year total is payable at once. Transgressors are denied promotion, may not receive bonuses or awards and are

refused state medical benefits for seven years.

There are punishments for women who have intra-uterine devices removed without a local birth-control department's permission, and for men who have a vasectomy reversed. Penalties are prescribed for people who illegally test to discover the sex of the fetus because the traditional preference for male children has caused an epidemic of female abortions and a population imbalance. All these actions are punishable by fines of between about \$900 and \$2,000 Canadian.

In rural areas, couples may have a second child but must wait four years. Breaching this rule can lead to a fine of treble their annual income. More fines are stipulated for anyone concealing a pregnant woman who has already had her permitted number of kids. Officials failing to achieve birth-control targets are subject to disgrace and demotion.

Wang Zhongyu, a cabinet member, has urged family-planning workers to win support by meeting people's needs, not threatening them with punishment and "naked violence."

Of the baby murder, Chen Shengli, head of the state family-planning committee's education department, said: "Clearly, the educational level of these officials was quite poor. They didn't understand the law."

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