



Joint Letter to the EU and EU member states

To:

Ministers for Foreign Affairs of all EU member states
Donald Tusk, President of the European Council
Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission
Federica Mogherini, High Representative for Foreign Affairs / Vice-President of the European Commission

March 13, 2019

Re: The EU, China, and Human Rights

Your Excellencies,

We write regarding the ongoing discussions among European Union (EU) member states about EU-China relations, and ahead of the forthcoming series of EU-China dialogues, culminating in the EU-China Summit to be held in Brussels on April 9. At a moment when China poses threats to human rights domestically and internationally, it is essential that the EU take action to defend international human rights norms and institutions.

Since last year's Summit, President Xi's government continues its assault on human rights across China. Credible estimates suggest that more than one million Turkic Muslims are being arbitrarily detained across Xinjiang, simply on the basis of their identity, and outside of any legal process. Outside the camps, Xinjiang authorities surveil and control every aspect of life, imposing severe restrictions on their freedom of religion, and on the rights to freedoms of expression, association, and movement. In Tibet, authorities have intensified political education and imposed restrictions on informal community groups.

Across the country, lawyers, journalists, perceived critics, and human rights defenders continue to endure arbitrary detention, imprisonment, and enforced disappearance. Legal reform has not simply stalled but reversed, erasing many of the last two decades' gains with respect to placing constraints on state power. Beijing has invested heavily in rapid expansion of a high-tech

surveillance state, giving it ever-greater control over society. Chinese authorities tightened control in advance of the 60th “Tibetan National Uprising Day” on March 10, including closing the Tibet Autonomous Region for two months to foreign tourists.

Chinese leaders’ turn against the universality of human rights is also increasingly visible through China’s foreign policy. In a chilling indication of its longer-term agenda to weaken key human rights institutions, in March 2018, China succeeded in advancing a resolution at the Human Rights Council, focusing on its vision for “win-win cooperation,” while omitting any role for independent civil society, any mention of accountability, and other core parts of the Council’s mandate.

Beyond its own borders, Beijing has pressed other governments, including several EU member states, to forcibly return asylum seekers to China. It has also stepped up harassment of diaspora communities worldwide. Not only does Beijing continue to arbitrarily detain EU citizens, including Gui Minhai, but it is now also prosecuting two Canadian citizens on charges of stealing state secrets – one of the most serious charges under Chinese law – in apparent retaliation against Ottawa over a diplomatic dispute. Throughout the year, China pressed ahead with its “One Belt, One Road” initiative, which lacks mechanisms for due diligence, consultation with affected communities, or labor rights, including in EU member states.

It is clear that the Chinese government poses a threat to human rights around the world, and to the EU as a critical institutional defender of human rights. The tough negotiations the EU and its member states have ahead of every session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, or in relation to any human rights statement that concerns China, are ongoing indications of this difficulty. Perhaps more emblematic is the fact that as we approach the 30th anniversary of the June 1989 Tiananmen Square bloodshed, Beijing has provided no accountability for the killings, enforced disappearances, or imprisonment of Tiananmen activists, but rather continued persecution of the memory and speech about the crackdown.

In order to affirm the EU’s foundational principle of promoting human rights, to continue to press for positive change in China, and to send an unambiguous message to Chinese leaders through this upcoming series of meetings, we urge you to:

- Along the lines of the EU’s statement to the High Level Segment of the Human Rights Council, press China to allow meaningful access to Xinjiang for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and other UN representatives;
- Publicly and privately press before, during, and after the Summit to secure the release of Gui Minhai, Huang Qi, Wang Quanzhang, Guligeina Tashimaimaiti, Ilham Tohti, Tashi Wangchuk, and Lee Ming-che.
- Consistent with its response to an inadequate bilateral human rights dialogue in Beijing in July 2018, the EEAS should again promptly publish a frank assessment of the forthcoming human rights dialogue. Until such time as the Chinese government engages in the dialogue in good faith, the EEAS should continue to consider a “shadow” dialogue with independent Chinese civil society. Acknowledge that, despite commendable efforts

by the EEAS, the EU-China human rights dialogue has failed to produce tangible results, and that the dialogue should complement, not substitute, higher-level talks on human rights with Chinese authorities;

- Identify specific human rights issues the Chinese government needs to address as a strategic priority for the EU and its member states, starting with the closure of “political education” camps in Xinjiang, abolition of the death penalty, and an end to the persecution of human rights defenders;
- Insist on the ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 21 years on from China’s signature of the Covenant; and
- Commit to publicly marking the 30th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square crackdown in June 2019, and the anniversary of Liu Xiaobo’s death in July 2019.

In the coming weeks, the EU and its member states have multiple occasions to prioritize these urgent human rights concerns at preparatory meetings and at the Summit. Each missed opportunity to articulate specific human rights improvements is a message to China’s leadership – and people across China and the world – that those concerns remain subordinated to other issues.

Thank you for your consideration of these important matters. We look forward to discussing these issues at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Amnesty International
China Aid
Christian Solidarity Worldwide
Frontline Defenders
Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker
International Campaign for Tibet
International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
International Service for Human Rights
International Tibet Network
Human Rights in China
Human Rights Watch
Unrepresented Nations & Peoples Organization
World Uyghur Congress