



Dear President Michel,  
Dear EU Heads of State,

Ahead of the European Council of 29-30 June 2023, our organizations urge you to ensure that human rights remain at the core of a robust and ambitious European Union (EU) approach to relations with the government of China.

This year, we have voiced our shared, urgent concerns on the deteriorating human rights situation in China with EU and member state decision-makers ahead of the [EU-China human rights dialogue](#) in February and the [informal Foreign Affairs Council](#) (“Gymnich”) in May.

Uyghurs, Kazakhs and other members of predominantly Muslim ethnic groups in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (“Xinjiang” or “Uyghur Region”) continue to face crimes against humanity and other serious human rights violations, including torture, arbitrary detention, family separation, forced sterilization and state-imposed forced labour that comprise state efforts to erase their religious and cultural identities. In Tibet, the Chinese authorities continue to apply aggressive assimilationist policies that violate the educational, religious, cultural and linguistic rights of the Tibetan people and threaten to ultimately eradicate Tibetan culture and identity – including a compulsory boarding school system which separates Tibetan children from their families and enforces Chinese-language education. The imposition of the dangerously vague and broad National Security Law in Hong Kong has led to an unprecedented erosion of the rights to freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly, and a closure of civic space more generally.

Human rights defenders in China, including lawyers and activists who are routinely subjected to surveillance, harassment and imprisonment, face an intensified crackdown this year, including as a [direct result](#) of their interactions with the EU Delegation, as in the cases of Yu Wensheng and Xu Yan. In international fora, the Chinese government continues to undermine the normative framework for human rights protection by prioritizing development over all other rights, emphasising collective interests over individual rights and promoting procedural aspects of state co-operation over the substance of human rights.

To respond to these grim developments, the European Council should ensure that the current [review and recalibration](#) of the March 2019 [EU-China Strategic Outlook](#) contributes to strengthening EU actions on human rights in China, prioritizing strong and concrete human rights outcomes across all areas of relations.

The EU-China Strategic Outlook states that “the ability of EU and China to engage effectively on human rights will be an important measure of the quality of the bilateral relationship.” As [pointed out](#) by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, China “is becoming more repressive at home and more assertive abroad.” In April, the G7 also [expressed](#) concerns about human rights in Xinjiang/the Uyghur region, Tibet and Hong Kong. The EU and its member states cannot hope to build a more reliable geopolitical partnership with the government of China if it fails to address core human rights concerns.

The June 2023 European Council will be a crucial opportunity to ensure that the EU’s approach to its relations with the government of China redoubles action in response to the human rights crisis in the country.

In this spirit, the EU and its member states should build on the EU-China Strategic Outlook and:

- **Issue European Council Conclusions that unequivocally commit to robust and ambitious engagement on human rights in China at the highest levels and across all areas of EU and member state relations with China.**

- **Recalibrate the EU strategy to ensure that EU efforts are aimed at fully addressing and improving China’s human rights record, and at defending the international human rights system from the Chinese government’s assault.** The EU strategy should call into question the potential for good-faith cooperation from the Chinese government on human rights issues; fully consider how uncritical cooperation may risk legitimizing repressive laws, policies and practices; and take action to counter China’s narratives undermining international human rights institutions and norms. The EU and its member states should **pro-actively mainstream efforts on human rights in China across all of EU-China relations**, avoiding opening any dialogue on mutually recognized international human rights commitments in the name of discussing divergences and instead adopting a concerted, strategic approach to challenge Chinese government policies, practices and narratives that undermine human rights.
- **Set measurable benchmarks and deliverables for human rights progress in China**, identifying how the human rights situation has an impact on all aspects of EU-China relations, and how a necessary response should involve EU action beyond the standard practices of the bilateral human rights dialogue or engagement in UN human rights fora. These benchmarks should include the meaningful implementation of recommendations from the United Nations (UN) Treaty Bodies, Special Procedures and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)<sup>1</sup>, including the release of arbitrarily detained human rights defenders, lawyers and others deprived of their liberty for exercising their human rights, the repeal of legal provisions incompatible with international human rights standards, and access to the Uyghur region and Tibetan areas by independent international human rights experts.
- **Commit to use all instruments at their disposal to urgently respond to human rights violations** in particular in Hong Kong, Tibet, Xinjiang/the Uyghur region and Inner Mongolia, and against peaceful critics and human rights defenders. The EU and member states should ensure that this includes adapting their approach toward engaging Chinese government officials and entities responsible for devising and implementing abusive policies. The EU and its member states should take stock of the absence of genuine commitment to human rights by the government of China, despite undertaking dozens of human rights dialogues over nearly three decades, and seriously reconsider the reiteration of this exercise. Lack of progress brought about by these dialogues should inform the EU’s wider strategy to address human rights violations in the country in a more effective manner. Importantly, the EU should follow up on the OHCHR [report](#) on Xinjiang by intensifying its outreach to all members of the UN Human Rights Council towards the long-overdue creation of a UN investigative and monitoring mechanism.

At a time when the stakes for human rights in China – and for those who defend them – remain high, we remain convinced that a clear, public, ambitious and strategic EU approach to human rights in China can make a crucial difference.

Yours sincerely,

Amnesty International  
 Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW)  
 Clean Clothes Campaign International Office  
 DEMAS – Association for Democracy Assistance and Human Rights  
 Front Line Defenders  
 Human Rights in China (HRIC)  
 Human Rights Watch  
 International Campaign for Tibet  
 International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)  
 International Service for Human Rights  
 World Uyghur Congress  
 29 Principles

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<sup>1</sup> These include: Concluding Observations to China, Hong Kong and Macao by the Committee against Torture ([2015](#)), the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination ([2018](#)), the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights ([2023](#)), the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women ([2023](#)); Concluding Observations to Hong Kong and Macao by the Human Rights Committee ([2022](#)); the OHCHR Assessment of human rights concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region ([2022](#)); the Decision 1 (108) by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination under its Early Warning and Urgent Action procedure ([2022](#)); and the seven benchmarks in a joint communication by fifteen Special Procedures experts ([2022](#)).