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EU | On anniversary of crackdown, strong stance on human rights in China more important than ever

In high-level dialogues around the third anniversary of China's 'July 9 Crackdown', the European Union must press the Chinese government for the release of detained activists, say human rights groups.

On the anniversary of the most widespread assault on human rights activists since 1989, ISHR and other rights groups urge the European Union (EU) to press for release of those unjustly detained, and to ensure the government ceases its attacks against human rights defenders.

On July 9, 2015, Chinese security officials initiated a sweeping wave of arrests, detentions and threats against China's rights defense lawyers and other human rights defenders. It set the tone for Xi Jinping's increasing efforts in the years since to suppress human rights activism and stifle dissent, and has become known as the [July 9 Crackdown](#).

The majority of human rights defenders swept up in the crackdown were briefly held and questioned, then released, but many were subject to months of residential surveillance in a designated location. United Nations experts have said such detention may amount to 'de facto incommunicado detention' in violation of China's international obligations.

Joshua Rosenzweig, East Asia Research Director at [Amnesty International](#) notes: "*So-called "residential surveillance" is a formidable weapon wielded by China's security forces. In their discussions with the Chinese government, the EU must send a clear message that this practice has got to go.*"

Four of the individuals taken during the crackdown, after extended pre-trial detentions, have been sentenced to harsh prison sentences for trumped-up crimes such as "inciting subversion of the State".

"Despite the time that has passed, this crackdown is far from over", says Sarah M Brooks, advocate and Brussels liaison at the International Service for Human Rights. "As the EU meets with its Chinese counterparts, Wang Quanzhang, one of the first lawyers caught up in the arrests, remains in incommunicado detention – where he has been for almost three years."

Those who have shared their experience of detention have all testified that they suffered some form of torture or cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment. Additionally, family members, colleagues and friends of those detained have been harassed, beaten and barred from travel.

"These detentions have a serious chilling effect on human rights advocacy. The effect is exacerbated when the government exacts penalties from innocent family members – as they have done through the years-long isolation

of poet and artist Liu Xia. It is an intimidation tactic that is patently cruel," adds Emma Achilli, the Head of EU Office for [Front Line Defenders](#).

Civil society groups have long advocated for the EU to ensure robust and effective human rights dialogues, especially with repressive governments like China's. Brooks concludes:

"The answer today is simple: the EU cannot come back from any dialogue, including [the EU-China Summit](#), emptyhanded. China must allow Wang Quanzhang and Liu Xia, as well as Gui Minhai, Ilham Tohti, Lee Ming-che, Tashi Wangchuk and other prisoners of conscience to rejoin their families."

This statement is supported by Amnesty International, Front Line Defenders and the [World Uyghur Congress](#).

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