

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



European Institutions Office

Catherine Ashton

High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
Vice President of the European Commission

Brussels, 28 March 2011
Our Ref: B1057

Dear Ms. Ashton,

Urgent request for European Union support for human rights activists in China

We are deeply concerned about the safety and well-being of several Chinese activists who have been detained and harassed by the Chinese authorities in an apparent attempt to block anti-government demonstrations inspired by protests across the Middle East. It is the worst and widest clampdown we have observed since the crackdowns in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region and Tibet Autonomous Region in 2009 and 2008. The authorities are not just detaining seasoned dissidents, but also seem to be seeking to silence a new generation of activists, many of whom are simply bloggers or tweeters.

Calls in China for a 'Jasmine revolution' in February consisted of online instructions to 'stroll' through designated public places on Sunday afternoons. News of the appeal spread quickly via Twitter and blogs, urging protesters to proclaim: "We want food, we want work, we want housing, we want fairness." However, faced with a large state security presence, no such large gatherings occurred.

Yet hundreds of activities have been detained on China's most serious security charges such as 'subverting state power' and 'illegal assembly', some for as little as being active online and mentioning the 'Jasmine Revolution' on Twitter. This includes many young Chinese who refer to themselves as 'netizens', i.e. active citizens on the internet, rather than 'activists'. Dozens are being detained without charge, including prominent human rights lawyers. Other activists have been detained briefly, subjected to police surveillance and controls, or have disappeared. Intimidation and arrests have aroused fear in many provinces, and charges regularly lead to hefty prison terms. We have collected information on over 100 activists who have been detained, subjected to monitoring and intimidation by the security forces, or have gone missing since late February.

In early March, China's National People's Congress (NPC) held its annual meeting. As every year, the authorities rounded up and placed many activists and others perceived as a threat under strict surveillance. This year, rather than releasing them after the NPC concluded, many activists remain in detention.

The recent clampdown reveals China's uneasiness at the use of the internet by people's movements in North Africa and the Middle East. Instead of fearing unrest, the Chinese authorities should encourage greater participation and uphold people's right to express diverse views in tackling the country's problems of social justice, corruption and inequality. The authorities must end the repression of calls for peaceful political reform, and listen to voices demanding change.

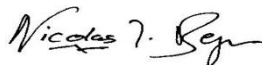
We note that the EU on 27 February 2011 issued a local statement expressing concern over detention, intimidation and assault of foreign journalists in Beijing. The EU must go beyond only protecting its own citizens. The many voices, which the authorities currently seek to silence, deserve the EU's full recognition and vocal support.

Given the recent clampdown on peaceful protest in China, we urge the EU to demonstrate its ambitions as a global leader in human rights by:

- Publicly expressing concern about the continuing crackdown on human rights activists, calling for peaceful protestors to be released, and for the freedoms of expression, association and assembly to be fully respected.
- Inquire with the Chinese Government about the legal status, whereabouts and safety of those detained, under surveillance, or gone 'missing' in connection with Jasmine revolution-inspired demonstrations in China.
- Urging China to take effective measures to guarantee the freedoms of expression, association and assembly in line with its constitution and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which it has signed and declared its intention to ratify.

We would much appreciate feedback on steps taken to raise this issue, both in your capacity of High Representative/Vice-President at the highest political level, as well as by the EU at local level in Beijing.

Yours sincerely,



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Director

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