

5 May 2023

Dear High Representative Borrell,  
Dear Ministers of Foreign Affairs,

### **Joint Public Letter: EU strategy review should double down on human rights in China**

Ahead of the informal “Gymnich” meeting of European Union (EU) Foreign Affairs ministers on 12 May, our organizations urge the EU and its member states to ensure that their [review and recalibration](#) of the March 2019 [EU-China Strategic Outlook](#) results in concrete, strategic and strengthened actions on human rights in China.

Ahead of the EU-China human rights dialogue in March 2023, our organizations called on the EU and its member states to prioritize strong and concrete human rights outcomes across all areas of their relations with China and to suspend the EU-China human rights dialogue until it can be a meaningful and effective exchange. Since the adoption of the 2019 strategy, our concerns have become all the more urgent. In August 2022, a [report](#) by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) found that China’s treatment of Uyghurs and other predominantly Muslim groups “may constitute international crimes, in particular crimes against humanity.”

In recent months, UN experts – including the [UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (CESCR) – have expressed concern about reports of a “large-scale campaign to eradicate Tibetan culture and language” including the coerced residential (boarding) school system imposed on Tibetan children as well as non-voluntary resettlement of nomadic herders, particularly Tibetan herders. In both cases, the CESCR urged China to take immediate action to abolish such schools and to halt non-voluntary resettlement, relocation or rehousing programmes. Furthermore, the CESCR Committee raised in their concluding observations the issue of “large-scale arbitrary deprivation of liberty” within the detention facilities, in which Uyghurs and other Turkic people are reportedly being subjected to forced labour and other inhumane treatment and called for an immediate end to all systems of forced labour present within the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, including labour transfer outside the region.

At the same time, human rights defenders, activists and perceived critics of the government in China continue to face deepening repression. In recent weeks, Chinese authorities [handed down](#) prison sentences of 14 and 12 years respectively to legal scholar Xu Zhiyong and human rights lawyer Ding Jiaxi on 10 April. They also [detained](#) human rights lawyer Yu Wensheng and his wife Xu Yan in a likely reprisal en route to a meeting at the EU delegation in Beijing on 14 April. On the same day, human rights lawyers Wang Quanzhang, Wang Yu and Bao Longjun were also placed under house arrest. These serious developments took place amidst a series of high-level visits by EU and member state leaders and a European Parliament plenary discussion with the High Representative on EU-China relations. Yet they met with little public reaction from the EU.

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 Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, China “is becoming more repressive at home and more assertive abroad.” The EU cannot hope to build a more reliable geopolitical partnership with China if it fails to address core human rights concerns. The forthcoming Gymnich meeting and the June 2023 European Council will be a crucial opportunity to ensure that the EU’s approach to its relations with 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 commit to:

- **Recalibrate “Action 1”<sup>1</sup> of their strategy on China to ensure that the EU’s efforts are aimed at addressing and improving China’s human rights record.** In view of the deteriorating human rights situation in the country, China’s increasing global role and responsibility and its active influence to shift international human rights norms, the EU strategy should call into question the potential for good-faith cooperation from China, fully consider how uncritical cooperation may risk legitimizing China’s authoritarian model and mobilise objective information to counter China’s narratives undermining international human rights institutions and norms.
- **Use all instruments at their disposal to urgently respond to human rights violations in dealing with Chinese government officials and entities responsible** for devising and implementing abusive policies, in particular in Hong Kong, Tibet, Xinjiang/the Uyghur region and Inner Mongolia, and against peaceful critics and human rights defenders. The EU should take stock of the absence of genuine commitment to human rights by China during the recent human rights dialogue and make it clear that such dialogue can only be one part of a wider strategy that mainstreams human rights actions across all areas of EU-China relations up to highest level. The EU should follow up on the OHCHR report on Xinjiang by leading on the creation of a UN investigative and monitoring mechanism.
- **Aim for concrete outcomes in engaging on China by setting measurable benchmarks and deliverables** for human rights change in the country, including the immediate and unconditional release of detained human rights defenders, lawyers and others deprived of their liberty for exercising their human rights.

We thank you in advance for your action on human rights in China and stand ready to provide any further information you may require.

Yours sincerely,

Amnesty International

Front Line Defenders

Human Rights Watch

International Campaign for Tibet

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

International Service for Human Rights

Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization

World Uyghur Congress

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<sup>1</sup> "Action 1: The EU will strengthen cooperation with China to meet common responsibilities across all three pillars of the United Nations - Human Rights, Peace and Security, and Development." <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52019JC0005>