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UN Rights Council Urged to Press China to Drop Charges against Tibetan language rights advocate Tashi Wangchuk

In a statement delivered on behalf of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights at the 37th Regular Session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on March 1, 2018, ICT's Kai Mueller drew attention to the case of Tibetan language rights advocate Tashi Wangchuk as a striking example for the repression against Tibetan Human Rights Defenders.

Speaking under Agenda Item 3 "Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development", he welcomed the strong joint communication just issued by five UN Special Rapporteurs on the case of Tashi Wangchuk, as well as similar statements by a number of governments and parliaments calling for his release. He urged the Human Rights Council to join these calls and press China to drop all charges against Tashi Wangchuk and to release him immediately and unconditionally".

Following is the full text of Kai Mueller's statement.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY Human Rights Council Thirty-seventh Regular Session

March 1, 2018

Item 3: Report of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders

Statement delivered by Kai Mueller on behalf of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights

Mr. President,

We wish to thank the Special Rapporteur for his report (A/HRC/37/51) and commend the Special Rapporteur and his office for the work undertaken for the protection of Human Rights Defenders.

Ten years after major protests broke out across the Tibetan Plateau, the People's Republic of China has implemented harsh policies aimed at suppressing any challenge to its rule. As a result, almost any expression of Tibetan identity, acts of non-violent dissent, or criticism of ethnic or religious policies can today be considered by the authorities as 'splittist', and therefore illegal.

In this context, Tibetan Human Rights Defenders who peacefully advocate for fundamental rights and the preservation of the Tibetan culture increasingly face harassment, house arrest, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture.

A striking example for the repression against Tibetan Human Rights Defenders is the case of Tibetan language rights advocate Tashi Wangchuk.

The young Tibetan shopkeeper, who has been detained since January 2016 following the release of a New York Times video report¹ profiling his attempts to petition for the rights of Tibetans to speak and learn their own language at school, was tried by an Intermediate Court in Yushu in January this year on charges of 'inciting separatism', an offense punishable by a minimum of a five-year prison term. It is feared that he could be sentenced to up to 15 years in prison. Tashi Wangchuk has done nothing more than defending rights which are protected by the Chinese constitution and international law; if he is convicted, this would be in blatant contravention of his right to freedom of opinion and expression.

Mr. President, we have welcomed the strong joint communication just issued by five UN Special Rapporteurs on the case of Tashi Wangchuk², as well as similar statements by a number of governments and parliaments calling for his release.³ We urge the Human Rights Council to join these calls and press China to drop all charges against Tashi Wangchuk and to release him immediately and unconditionally.

Thank you, Mr. President.

¹ A Tibetan's Journey to Justice, New York Times, November 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/video/world/asia/10000004031427/a-tibetans-journey-for-justice.html>

² China: UN experts denounce the criminalization of linguistic and cultural rights, OHCHR, 21 February 2018, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22683&LangID=E>

³ Including statements by German, Australian, French and Latvian parliamentarians and a resolution by the European Parliament.