



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Ahead of EU-China Summit, civil society calls for bold action on human rights, Dalai Lama's succession

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July 18, 2025

As we approach the upcoming EU-China Summit in Beijing on July 24, marking 50 years of diplomatic relations, a coalition of civil society organizations including the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) has urged the EU to make human rights a central issue in its talks with Chinese officials.

In a joint letter to European Council President Charles Michel and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, the 17 signatory organizations urge the EU to address China's deepening human rights crisis with the same resolve it applies to trade and security challenges. The signatories stress that the Chinese government's repressive policies, are not confined within its borders, but represent a growing threat to human rights globally.

"As the EU marks 50 years of diplomatic ties with China, it must demonstrate that its commitment to human dignity and universal rights is not negotiable," ICT's EU Policy Director Vincent Metten said. "Upholding the right of the Tibetan people and in particular their right to freely determine the succession of the Dalai Lama is a litmus test for the credibility of the EU's commitment to human rights."

On Tibet specifically, the letter makes a critical recommendation: the EU and its member states must be prepared to use all available tools to ensure accountability for violations – "including in relation to the right to freedom of religion or belief, such as in the context of the selection of the next Dalai Lama."

In recent weeks, several European institutions and officials have voiced support for the Tibetan Buddhist community's right to determine the succession of the Tibetan spiritual leader free from state interference. This includes a European Parliament [resolution](#) adopted on 8 May, and the EU raised the issue during its [40th Human Rights Dialogue with China](#) on 13 June. On the occasion of the Dalai Lama's 90th birthday on 6 July, the Human Rights Ambassadors from seven European countries (Estonia, France, Germany, Iceland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom) also issued a [statement](#) reaffirming their support for Tibetans' religious freedom which "includes the right of the Tibetan Buddhist community to identify a successor".

The signatories also draw attention to a number of emblematic individual cases, including those of several Tibetans arbitrarily detained. Among them are three monks from Kirti monastery who remain [imprisoned for having peacefully celebrated the Dalai Lama's 80th birthday in 2015](#). These cases starkly illustrate the extreme restrictions on religious freedom in Tibet and the harsh reprisals faced by those who express reverence for the Dalai Lama.

Read the joint letter below.

Mr António Costa
President of the European Council
Ms Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European Commission
17 July 2025

Dear President Costa,

Dear President von der Leyen,

We write to urge you to prioritize human rights in the forthcoming European Union (EU)-China Summit to be held in China on July 24-25. At the recent G7 meeting, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen spoke of a “new China shock,” and urged that G7 members respond with greater cooperation, resilience and alternative approaches. We believe similar ambition should apply to the approach of the EU and its member states regarding the deepening human rights crisis in China, and that new initiatives be publicly articulated at the forthcoming Summit to build on and go beyond existing commitments set out in the March 2019 EU-China Strategic Outlook.

We appreciate the EU’s longtime support to independent civil society and human rights defenders across China, and welcome public remarks, such as strong statements at the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council, identifying particular cases of concern. We thank the EU for condemning the arbitrary detention of human rights legal activists Xu Yan and Yu Wensheng, who were detained en route to meeting with EU officials. In September 2022, then-High Representative and Vice President Josep Borrell helpfully echoed the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights’ (OHCHR) concern that Chinese government policies in the Uyghur region “may constitute international crimes, in particular crimes against humanity.” We acknowledge the recent – the fortieth – round of the EU-China human rights dialogue.

Yet these EU and member states’ initiatives have not deterred Chinese authorities’ wholesale assault on human rights since President Xi Jinping assumed power in 2012. He and other officials are confident in their impunity for widespread arbitrary detention, forced assimilation, forced labour and torture in China; and transnational repression, including in Europe. Chinese authorities not only refuse to comply with the vast majority of their international human rights obligations, they also seek to rewrite global human rights norms and weaken key international institutions.

We urge the EU and its member states to confront this human rights crisis—which increasingly affects not only people across China but also people worldwide—with the same determination to identify and commit to alternative approaches as it is now setting out on security and trade issues.

In that spirit, our organizations urge you to use the Summit to ensure justice for victims and survivors of Beijing’s violations and abuses by publicly:

1. Condemning the Chinese government’s crimes against humanity, and the impunity that sustains them, echoing the findings and recommendations of UN bodies, including the August 2022 OHCHR report on Xinjiang, the 2023 reviews of China by the Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the 2024 Universal Periodic Review (UPR), and UN Special Procedures. The EU should reiterate that crimes against humanity are subject to universal jurisdiction, and that those responsible can and should be held criminally responsible and face justice, including in EU member states. The 18 June 2025 announcement by Argentina’s highest criminal court to hear

a case brought by Uyghurs alleging Chinese authorities have committed genocide and crimes against humanity should lend confidence and momentum to similar initiatives across EU member states, and to a push for accountability through UN mechanisms. Doing so is consistent with High Representative Kaja Kallas' March 2025 remarks broadly supporting international law and the need for perpetrators to be "brought to justice."

2. Calling for the immediate and unconditional releases of human rights defenders who have been detained for their work, naming individuals explicitly, including EU citizen Gui Minhai, Sakharov Prize laureate Ilham Tohti and others identified in the most recent EU statement at the UN Human Rights Council: Gulshan Abbas, Anya Sengdra, Ekpar Asat, Chadrel Rinpoche, Rahile Dawut, Ding Jiayi, Ding Yuande, Dong Yuyu, Drugdra, Gao Zhen, Gao Zhisheng, Go Sherab Gyatso, Golog Palden, He Fangmei, Huang Qi, Huang Xueqin, Hushtar Isa, Yalkun Isa, Ji Xiaolong, Li Yanhe, Lobsang Gephel, Lobsang, Khedrub, Lu Siwei, Peng Lifa, Qin Yongmin, Ruan Xiaohuan, Semkyi Dolma, Tashi Dorje, Tashpolat Tiyp, Wang Bingzhang, Pastor Wang Yi, Kamile Wayit, Xie Yang, Xu Na, Xu Zhiyong, Yang Hengjun, Yang Maodong, Yu Wensheng, Pastor Zhang Chunlei and Zhang Zhan.
3. Emphasizing the commitments made at the G7 to ending transnational repression (TNR), including abuses undertaken by the Chinese government, both across EU member states and elsewhere. Those commitments can be demonstrated through investigations and prosecutions, while also supporting and protecting individuals and communities who may be or have already been targeted by TNR. These human rights abuses include intimidation, surveillance, threats or acts of physical violence, threats against family members and digital repression, in particular sexual harassment or degrading language targeting women.
4. Reiterating that the EU and its member states are ready to use all tools at their disposal to hold Chinese government officials accountable for human rights violations, including the right to freedom of religion or belief, such as in the context of the selection of the next Dalai Lama.
5. Stressing that the EU expects the Chinese government to comply with its freely-undertaken human rights obligations under international law, and calling for the urgent repeal of laws and criminal provisions incompatible with those obligations, including but not limited to the Hong Kong National Security Law, the Hong Kong Safeguarding National Security Ordinance, "picking quarrels and provoking trouble," "subversion" and "inciting subversion of state power," and the criminal procedure of "residential surveillance at a designated location," in line with recommendations by UN human rights bodies.

After 50 years of EU-China relations, the EU should take stock of deepening Chinese government repression inside and outside the country, and express solidarity with people across China who seek to exercise, uphold and defend human rights. The EU's recent decision to cancel an economic and trade dialogue with the Chinese government over serious differences suggests a willingness to pressure Beijing in new and different ways. Grave and worsening human rights violations by Chinese authorities should motivate new strategies. Without those, people across China—and in Europe—are increasingly at risk.

Amnesty International
Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
Chinese Human Rights Defenders
Christian Solidarity Worldwide
CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
Front Line Defenders
Hong Kong Watch
Human Rights in China
Human Rights Watch
Human Rights Without Frontiers
International Campaign for Tibet
International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR)
International Service for Human Rights
The Rights Practice
World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
World Uyghur Congress



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