



Your Excellency,

We write prior to the 37th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council to urge your delegation to send a clear message to China denouncing its rollback in respect for human rights.

Since President Xi Jinping assumed power in March 2013, Chinese authorities have unleashed a ferocious crackdown on human rights defenders, including lawyers, and undermined key legal protections for peaceful expression and association and the right to a fair trial. Five ongoing cases highlight these problems:

- Liu Xia, kept under house arrest after the death of her husband, Nobel laureate Liu Xiaobo, in July 2017.
- Wang Quanzhang, rights lawyer forcibly disappeared since July 9, 2015.
- Gui Minhai, Swedish citizen arbitrarily detained since his October 2015 forced disappearance from Thailand.
- Tashi Wangchuk, Tibetan cultural rights and education advocate, detained two years and awaiting a sentence on charges of inciting separatism.
- Yu Wensheng, prominent human rights lawyer disbarred, then arbitrarily detained, in January 2018.

In March 2016, 12 UN member states spoke out collectively on China's concerted effort to silence dissent and restrict fundamental freedoms, including in Hong Kong. At that session, and in the sessions that have followed, UN member states have regularly raised China in their national statements, with regard to general concerns about the restriction of civic space and arbitrarily detained human rights defenders such as Tashi Wangchuk, rights lawyer Jiang Tianyong, and Liu Xiaobo. Such concerted pressure, when applied consistently, has been an important factor in restraining Chinese government repression and in building the credibility of the Human Rights Council within the Chinese human rights movement. Conversely, when the Human Rights Council and its member states remain silent, the Council's credibility is undermined, emboldening China in its crackdown on dissenting voices.

Following President Xi's consolidation of power at the 19th Party Congress in November 2017, a renewed commitment to a joint statement has never been more timely. Other forms of coordinated approaches could bring further pressure on China's government, and could result in releases or sentence reductions for those arbitrarily deprived of their liberty.

Our organizations call on you, in your Item 4 General Debate statement at this and future sessions, to explicitly reaffirm your support for the 2016 Joint Statement and the issues it raised, in particular concerns about China's failure to respect due process rights. China's refusal to engage meaningfully with these concerns paints a grim picture of the government's respect for international human rights law and its cooperation with UN human rights mechanisms.

We also urge your government, either individually or alongside likeminded delegations, to call on the Council to issue a clear message to China which includes:

- calling for the immediate release of everyone detained for the peaceful expression of their political views, especially the five people noted above;
- condemning "residential surveillance in a designated location," which allows certain criminal suspects to be subjected to six months' secret detention, often without access to a lawyer; and
- urging that all relevant UN Special Rapporteurs be provided prompt access to the country, including Tibetan and Uyghur areas.

A collective show of support for civil society activists under threat will demonstrate the Council's commitment to improving the human rights of all people in China and strengthen its credibility, as the UN's premier human rights body, to meaningfully address human rights challenges around the world.

Your delegation's strong, express commitment to the protection and promotion of human rights in China is particularly important as human rights defenders inside and outside China prepare for the country's next Universal Periodic Review, scheduled for November 2018. For human rights defenders to have the courage to engage in this important process, with all the risks that it entails, it's critical that they know that they are not alone. Taking the above actions will be an important step in that regard.

We look forward to discussing these and other matters with you at your convenience.

Please be assured, your Excellency, of our highest consideration.

China Labour Bulletin
Christian Solidarity Worldwide
CIVICUS – World Alliance for Citizen Participation
Human Rights in China
Human Rights Watch
International Campaign for Tibet
International Commission of Jurists
International Federation of Human Rights Leagues
International Service for Human Rights
Lawyers for Lawyers
Lawyers Rights Watch Canada
PEN America
Swedish PEN
The Tibet Advocacy Coalition*
World Uyghur Congress

*Including the International Tibet Network Secretariat, Students for a Free Tibet, Tibet Initiative Deutschland, Tibet Justice Center, and Tibetan Youth Association in Europe