

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

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HUMAN
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Media Advisory Letter to the Prime Minister of Finland & EU Members

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(Helsinki, September 9, 2006) – Finland, the current holder of the EU Presidency, will organize the EU-China Summit in Helsinki on 9 September.

Human Rights Watch calls for a reform of the E.U.-China dialogue on human rights. Though we are impressed with the seriousness of E.U. staff members who pursue the dialogues, the semi-annual meetings have now largely become an end in themselves, without relevance to on-the-ground changes in the human rights climate.

More information on China can be found at
<http://www.hrw.org/doc?t=asia&c=china>

Attached please find the letter HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH sent to
Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen

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September 8, 2006

Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen
Prime Minister's Office
Snellmaninkatu 1 A, Helsinki
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FI-00023 Government, Finland
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Dear Prime Minister Vanhanen,

We are writing to urge you to ensure that human rights will feature prominently in the discussion at the upcoming European Union-China summit in Helsinki. At a time marked by a sharp deterioration of the human rights situation in China, the European Union (E.U.) has an important opportunity to constructively but firmly voice its concerns. The E.U., which was built on the fundamental values of human rights and justice, should make a strong public statement about its adherence to universal human rights norms and its profound concerns with the recent deterioration of the human rights situation in China.

Human Rights Watch is particularly concerned by the recent comments reported in the press by Finland's ambassador to Beijing, Antti Kuosmanen, who stated that human rights would "not be a dominant point" of the summit and that human rights were a "sensitive and delicate issue ... because we are dealing with values." These comments send the erroneous signal that compliance with human rights norms is a subjective matter, rather than reflecting what the E.U. and its member states believe: that human rights are universal.

We recognize that the E.U. has many urgent issues to discuss with Prime Minister Wen Jiabao and his team. Nevertheless, we ask that all E.U. officials involved reiterate their expectations that China will abide by its commitments as it agreed to when it ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in 2001, and signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1998.

In addition, we draw your particular attention to three broad issues.

Crackdowns on Civil Rights Lawyers and Restrictions on Free Expression

As you may know, in the past few weeks a string of arrests and sentences has led to serious concerns about the course of China's legal reforms and the government's commitment to upholding the rule of law. Since August, four high-profile cases against Chinese lawyers and journalists, all well-known social activists, have been brought to a close. What distinguished these cases was the Chinese government's clear intent to prosecute these individuals regardless of the cases' politically motivated charges, their legal and procedural irregularities, and the defendants' lengthy detentions and trial delays.

Chen Guangcheng, a blind lawyer who exposed severe violations of family planning policies, was sentenced to more than four years at the conclusion of a trial where his own lawyers were intimidated, physically assaulted, arrested by the police under pick pocketing charges and barred from entering the courtroom. Gao Zhisheng, a foremost human rights defender once hailed by the state press agency Xinhua as one of China's top ten lawyers, has been arrested and is being detained incommunicado in an undisclosed location after months of intimidation, surveillance and periods of house arrest. Zhao Yan, a researcher at the New York Times' Beijing bureau, was sentenced to three years in prison for alleged fraud charges. Ching Cheong, a journalist for the Singapore Straights Times, was sentenced under spying charges to five years in prison for spying for Taiwan in a trial that fell short of even minimal procedural guarantees.

Human Rights Watch has called for all of the charges to be dropped or sentences to be reversed. We hope E.U. representatives will reiterate a similar message.

E.U. – China human rights dialogue

Human Rights Watch calls for a reform of the E.U.-China dialogue on human rights. Though we are impressed with the seriousness of E.U. staff members who pursue the dialogues, the semi-annual meetings have now largely become an end in themselves, without relevance to on-the-ground changes in the human rights climate. From the Chinese government's perspective, they have been an effective tool to marginalize human rights, delay making real progress, and keep individual dialogue partners busy pursuing separate agendas and issues. For the dialogues to be meaningful, they must establish benchmarks and timetables for progress. For example, one benchmark could address the Chinese government's abolition of reeducation through labor and set a date by which the practice would be wholly phased out. Dialogues could be postponed until such steps had been taken.

Arms Embargo

Human Rights Watch remains greatly concerned by the apparent willingness of some E.U. countries to consider prematurely lifting the embargo on arms sales to China. At

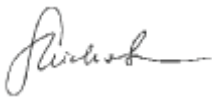
the time of its imposition, E.U. ministers acted in response to the brutal repression taking place in China and requested that “Chinese authorities to stop the executions and to put an end to the repressive actions against those who legitimately claim their democratic rights.” Human Rights Watch strongly urges the E.U. members not to vote to lift the 1989 E.U. arms embargo until the Chinese leadership changes its verdict that those who participated in the demonstrations were part of a “counterrevolutionary” rebellion, until there is an independent investigation into the events surrounding the massacre, and until those responsible are held publicly accountable. In the absence of any official accounting for the government response to Tiananmen, it is difficult to know whether protestors remain in jail, officials continue to enjoy impunity, and pro-democracy figures continue to suffer adverse consequences.

In addition, the E.U. should remain mindful of other ongoing human rights abuses in China, including torture of detainees and a justice system that does not respect the due process rights of criminal suspects; restrictions on the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and the right to act on those beliefs; harassment and arrest of HIV/AIDS activists; abuse of petitioners seeking remedies for official misconduct; and the absence of progress in holding national elections.

Thirty-one years ago, the ratification of the Helsinki Accords manifested the universal legitimacy of human rights norms beyond the existing divisions between the Eastern and the Western blocs. The European Union cannot remain silent in the face of such blatant abuses without eroding these universal values.

We appreciate the firm commitment the EU has shown in the past to human rights in China and urge it to continue its efforts.

Sincerely,



Sophie Richardson
Deputy Director
Asia Division
Human Rights Watch

Cc: President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso
Finnish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Erkki Tuomioja
Finnish Minister for Trade and Development, Paula Lehtomäki
Member of the European Commission, Benita Ferrero-Waldner.