

Mr. Nicolas Sarkozy
President of the French Republic

Re : Your visit in the People's Republic of China

Excellency,

We write to you regarding your upcoming visit to China at the end of November. Your trip comes at a time when China is sensitive to heightened international scrutiny as the host of the upcoming Olympic Games. The European Union-China Bilateral Human Rights Dialogue has drawn attention to many human rights issues, but there is still much to be done. European Union member states, and France in particular, must send a strong message to the Chinese government to use these last months before the Olympics to address serious human rights concerns.

In advance of your trip, we wish to draw your attention to key issues regarding the ongoing and systematic violations of human rights in China. We urge you to use this uniquely timed opportunity to raise the following issues with your Chinese counterparts.

Protections for human rights defenders

Journalists, lawyers, environmental activists, and other human rights defenders face ongoing harassment in China. Despite official assertion of respect for individual human rights, arbitrary arrests and detentions, acts of torture, and enforced disappearances are commonplace. For example, **Mr. Chen Guangcheng**, a blind, self-taught lawyer and rights defense activist, filed a class-action lawsuit against the city of Linyi in Shandong province over forced abortion and forced-sterilization practices. Mr. Chen was subsequently convicted of destruction of property and of assembling a crowd to disrupt traffic. He is now in prison where he has suffered repeated ill-treatment. Such actions have a chilling effect on other human rights defenders, and undermine the rule of law that the government says it is committed to building.

The right to adequate housing

As urban areas continue to rapidly develop, some private companies have colluded with local authorities to evict hundreds of thousands of residents from old neighborhoods and develop the areas for profit. Moreover, local corruption contributes to the dispossession of farmers and prevents adequate compensation. Numerous cases of forced eviction have been documented, in violation of the right to adequate housing. One housing rights activist and petitioner from Shanghai, Ms **Mao Hengfeng**, was detained in early 2006 as she petitioned in Beijing. She has since been imprisoned for "intentional damage of property" on the grounds that she destroyed lamps in the room where she was held. She, too, has been subject to mistreatment since her imprisonment.

Application of the death penalty

National figures on executions carried out annually remain a state secret, but estimates from human rights organizations and Chinese academics range from over 3,000 to 8,000. As one of the benchmarks for progress in the EU-China Human Rights Bilateral Dialogue, the EU has for many years demanded that China publicize the number of executions carried out. We urge you to reiterate the need for these figures in the interest of transparency, to strengthen judicial independence, and to open up public debate.

Cultural rights of minorities

Despite protections on paper for ethnic minorities in China, discrimination remains a serious problem throughout the country, particularly in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and in Tibetan areas. The government has used the fight against terrorism as a pretext to repress cultural rights for Uyghurs, interpreting religious expression and religious education as separatist acts. Similar problems exist in Tibetan communities. One notable case is the disappearance of **Adruk Lopoe**, a Tibetan monk arrested by the police and the army last August.

China's role in human rights abuses abroad

China is a political and economic leader worldwide and regionally, particularly in Asia, including Burma. We urge you to reiterate that China should employ its influence in Burma to call for the immediate release of all political prisoners, beginning with **Aung San Suu Kyi**, as one precondition for negotiations with the democratic opposition.

As public opinion and the media increasingly focus on China in the final countdown to the Olympic Games, the human rights message to China requires a strong and coherent tone. China cannot host an international event celebrating peace and international unity while simultaneously perpetrating human rights abuses.

We urge you to raise your concerns on human rights and press for reform during this opportune visit.

Yours sincerely,

Souhayr Belhassen,
President of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

Jean-Pierre Dubois,
President of the Ligue des droits de l'Homme et du citoyen (LDH)

Sharon Hom,
Executive Director of Human Rights in China (HRIC)