

Human Rights Dialogue between the European Union and China

The 35th round of the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue was held in Brussels on 22-23 June. The two-day programme included the meeting of the Dialogue on the first day, and round-table discussions between European and Chinese participants, including Members of the European Parliament, representatives from civil society and academia, as well as a field visit to the refugee centre Bruxelles-Petit-Château on the second day.

The meetings allowed for candid discussions on a wide range of human rights related issues and cases of concern.

During the Dialogue, the European Union emphasised the deteriorating situation for civil and political rights in China, which has been accompanied by the detention and conviction of a significant number of Chinese human rights defenders and lawyers. Restrictions on the freedom of expression in China, and systemic issues in the criminal justice system, including cases of arbitrary detention and allegations of torture, were also raised by the European Union. In addition, the two sides discussed migration and the rights of refugees, the freedom of religion and belief, the rights of persons belonging to minorities, especially in Tibet and Xinjiang, and the freedom of peaceful assembly and association, including the implementation of China's Foreign NGO Activity Management Law.

The Human Rights Dialogue provided an opportunity for the European Union to raise the cases of human rights defenders whose detention and conviction by the Chinese authorities is incompatible with the nature of their work to promote human rights. The expectation of the European Union, as reiterated in the Dialogue, is that all individuals detained in connection with their advocacy of human rights be released from custody, that they should be allowed to be represented by a lawyer of their choosing, be given the possibility of meeting their family members, have access to appropriate medical assistance when required, and have allegations of their mistreatment promptly investigated. The cases raised by the European Union included:

- Political prisoners Liu Xiaobo and Illham Tohti;
- Human rights lawyers Jiang Tianyong, Wang Quanzhang and Xie Yang;
- Individuals imprisoned in connection with their exercise of the universally-recognised right to freedom of expression, including Lu Yuyu, Zhang Haitao, Lû Gengsong, and Huang Zerong;
- Individuals persecuted for their religious beliefs, including Hu Shigen, Huang Yizi, Shao Zhumin, Li Guozhi, Gu Yuese and Zhang Shaojie.
- Individuals detained or sentenced in connection with their activities in promoting freedom of association, including Tashi Dorje, Meng Han, Xu Zhiyong and Gou Feixiong
- Tibetan activists, writers and religious figures who face criminal charges or have been imprisoned for exercising their right to freedom of expression, including Tashi Wangchuk, Druklo and Lobsang Kunchok.

Cooperation in international fora and the need to implement recommendations from international bodies, particularly recommendations which China received during its most recent UN Universal Periodic Review in 2013, were also discussed.

During the roundtable discussion, participants discussed the EU's and China's respective policies and practices for promoting and protecting human rights, including the role played by legislators, civil society and academia.

The European Union's delegation was led by Ms Paola Pampaloni, Deputy Managing Director for Asia and the Pacific in the European External Action Service. The Chinese delegation was led by Ms Liu Hua, Special Representative for Human Rights and Deputy Director General for International Organisations and Conferences, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China.