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The EU and China held the 39th session of joint Human Rights Dialogue in Chongqing on 16 June. The Dialogue was preceded by a side visit to Tibet between 13 and 15 June.

The agenda and programme allowed for in-depth discussions on a wide range of human and labour rights developments both in the EU and in China.

The EU reiterated its persistent concerns over the restrictions on fundamental freedoms, labour rights and the use of forced labour, limits on due process rights and the lack of judicial independence in China. The EU also raised the issues on the freedom of expression, the freedom of assembly, the freedom of religion or belief as well as the right to equality and freedom from discrimination, including women's and LGBTI rights.

Furthermore, the EU reiterated its unequivocal opposition to the death penalty in all circumstances. The EU urged China to introduce a moratorium on the death penalty and asked China to provide transparent data related to its use of capital punishment.

The EU also stressed that the selection of religious leaders should happen without any government interference and in respect of religious norms, including in the case of the succession of the Dalai Lama.

The EU recalled the particularly vulnerable situation of persons belonging to religious, ethnic and linguistic minorities across China, including Uyghurs and Tibetans. The EU also referred to the negative impact of Hong Kong's new national security legislation on the rights and freedoms of the people of Hong Kong, and the erosion of the high degree of

autonomy guaranteed by the Basic Law and China's international commitments towards the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

The EU reiterated its further concerns about the very serious human rights situation in China, in particular in Xinjiang, in the Tibetan areas and Hong Kong. In particular, the EU referred to reports on the crackdown on human rights defenders, lawyers and journalists in China. The EU urged China to investigate and stop human rights violations, expressing concern for cases of unlawful detention, enforced disappearance, torture and ill-treatment. The EU raised several individual cases, as included in its most recent Item 4 statement delivered at the 55th Session of the Human Rights Council on 20 March, and called upon China to immediately release those who are detained in violation of due process requirements:

- EU citizen Gui Minhai,
- Uyghurs, including Sakharov Prize winner Ilham Tohti, Rahile Dawut and Gulshan Abbas,
- Tibetan activists, writers and religious leaders, including Go Sherab Gyatso and Tashi Dorje,
- Individuals deprived of their liberty for their exercise of the freedom of religion or belief, including Xu Na, Pastor Wang Yi, Zhang Chunlei and Ding Yuande,
- Human Rights defenders and lawyers deprived of their liberty for having promoted and protected human rights, including Yu Wensheng and Xu Yan, who were detained on their way to the EU Delegation in Beijing to attend a meeting with senior EU officials,
- Individuals deprived of their liberty for their exercise of the freedom of expression, including citizen journalist Zhang Zhan, stressing that the heavy surveillance still imposed on her and the restrictions on her movements are unacceptable,
- Women's rights activist Li Qiaochu who was convicted for her advocacy against torture and her involvement in human and women's rights, and
- Individuals deprived of their liberty for their exercise of the freedom of peaceful assembly or demonstration, such as Peng Lifa and Kamile Wayit.

During the Dialogue, the EU also recognised China's development achievements which have resulted in significant poverty alleviation among its population.

China provided information on its laws and procedures which, in the view of the EU, clearly prioritise national security and counterterrorism over the protection of fundamental freedoms, including in Xinjiang and Tibet. The EU recommended the reassessment of China's national security framework to ensure China's compliance with international human rights law. The EU encouraged China to extend a general invitation to all UN Special Procedures and monitoring bodies to assess China's human rights record and address their

recommendations for the improvement of the relevant policy and legislative frameworks, including in Tibet and Xinjiang. In this respect, the EU also underlined the importance of the work of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

China raised the situation and treatment of refugees and migrants, and manifestations of racism and xenophobia in the EU. China also focused on economic, social and cultural rights, while, in the context of business and human rights, the EU updated on incoming European legislation that will introduce human rights due diligence requirements for companies, including in their value chains. The EU also referred to the regulation to prohibit products made with forced labour on the EU market.

The EU and China agreed on the importance of upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The EU and China discussed how to achieve both globally and domestically the full realisation of economic, social and cultural rights. The EU highlighted that this realisation must happen on an equal basis with civil and political rights, and recalled that human rights, whether civil, cultural, economic, political or social, are interconnected, interdependent, equally important and equally necessary to protect human dignity. The EU reaffirmed that the full respect for all human rights is a pre-condition to achieve sustainable and inclusive development, economic growth and prosperity.

The EU and China will explore opportunities for cooperation in the multilateral framework on economic social and cultural rights, business and human rights, climate change and human rights, women and children rights, as well as the rights of persons with disabilities. The EU reiterated that any cooperation shall be in compliance with international human rights law.

The Human Rights Dialogue was followed by an exchange of views with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the Beijing Institute of Technology in Beijing on 17 June.

A side visit to Tibet took place before the Human Rights Dialogue, in Nyingchi and Lhasa. It was organised by the relevant Chinese authorities at central and local level. The programme included visits to boarding schools, municipalities, cultural and religious sites, relocated Tibetan families, as well as to a prison. The side visit reflected the majority of the EU's requests, except for meetings with individual prisoners. The short and dense programme provided an opportunity to gain a certain understanding of the reality on the ground and challenges in the Tibet Autonomous Region. Following the visit, the EU put forward several recommendations to ensure full bilingual education, the preservation of the cultural heritage, identity and fundamental freedoms of the Tibetan people. The EU would encourage more visits from the international community and civil society organisations.

At the end of the programme, the EU chair debriefed Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs

Miao Deyu on the outcome of the Dialogue.

The Human Rights Dialogue was co-chaired by Paola Pampaloni, Deputy Managing Director for Asia and the Pacific in the European External Action Service and by Shen Bo, Director General for International Organisations and Conferences, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. EU Member States participated as observers to the Dialogue in Chongqing.

The EU and China agreed to continue their exchanges in view of the next Human Rights Dialogue in 2025.

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