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34th EU-China Dialogue on Human Rights

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On 30 November and 1 December 2015, the European Union and the People's Republic of China held the 34th round of the EU-China Dialogue on Human Rights in Beijing. The delegation of the European Union was led by Mr Ugo Astuto, Acting Managing Director for Asia and the Pacific in the European External Action Service. The Chinese delegation was led by Mr Li Junhua, Director-General for International Organisations and Conferences, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China.

Both sides consider human rights to be an important part of their bilateral relations, as recognised in the Joint Statement adopted during the 2015 EU-China Summit, which celebrated the 40th anniversary of EU-China diplomatic relations. For the past 20 years, human rights dialogues have provided an opportunity for the EU and China to engage in in-depth discussions on human rights and it is hoped that the dialogue will continue to mature.

The 34th EU-China human rights dialogue allowed the two sides to have a detailed exchange of views on a wide range of human rights issues. The EU raised, in particular, concerns about recent developments in China, such as pending legislation on national security issues (counter-terrorism, cybersecurity and the administration of overseas non-governmental organisations), the right to adequate housing and reform of the Hukou system, the rights of persons belonging to minorities, especially in Tibet and Xinjiang, freedom of religion or belief, off-line and on-line freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly and association, the due process of law, arbitrary detention, torture and the death penalty. The European Union also articulated its concern at the ongoing

detention of a number of human rights lawyers and activists who were arrested in July and August 2015. Furthermore, some 20 individual cases were raised in the context of the discussion about China's human rights situation to illustrate EU concerns, including those of Liu Xiaobo, Ilham Tohti, Hada, Pu Zhiqiang, Xu Zhiyong, Gao Zhisheng, Wang Yu and her son, Bao Zhuoxuan. The EU also acknowledged the announcement of the decision to release Gao Yu on medical parole.

The exchange about recent developments in the European Union began with an introduction on the 2014 European Commission report on the implementation of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. The Chinese side raised the issues of migrants' protection, xenophobia and religious discrimination in the EU. Cooperation in international fora and the implementation of recommendations from international bodies, in particular those made during China's recent review by the Committee Against Torture, were also raised.

Two further issues specific to this dialogue were discussed, namely the social integration of migrant workers in China and refugees and asylum-seekers in Europe and, secondly, environmental protection and human rights, with a special emphasis on the role of civil society organisations, the importance of freedom of expression and unimpeded access to information.

The Human Rights Dialogue was followed by a series of meetings with the State Administration for Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Civil Affairs and the State Administration for Ethnic Affairs and field visits to the Research centre for Women's human rights at the China Women's University and Beijing Zhicheng Legal Aid Centre for Rural Migrant Workers.

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