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March 20, 2019

Emmanuel Macron
President of the French Republic
55, rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré
75008 Paris

Re: Visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping

Dear President Macron,

I write on the occasion of the forthcoming visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to France on March 24-26. President Xi has presided over the worst deterioration of human rights in China in decades. If France intends to play a leading role worldwide in defending international human rights standards and what you have called the “common goods,” such as freedom and justice, human rights concerns should feature publicly and privately in your discussions.

Credible estimates indicate that more than one million ethnic Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims are being arbitrarily detained across Xinjiang, simply on the basis of their identity, and outside of any legal process. Outside the camps, Xinjiang authorities surveil and control every aspect of life, imposing severe restrictions on their freedom of religion, and on the rights to freedoms of expression, association, and movement. In Tibet, authorities have intensified “political education” and imposed restrictions on informal community groups. Across China, lawyers, journalists, perceived critics of the government, and human rights defenders face arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, and unfair trials. Legal reform has not simply stalled but reversed, erasing many of the gains of the last two decades with respect to placing constraints on state power. Beijing has invested heavily in rapid expansion of a high-tech surveillance state, giving it ever-greater control over society and the privacy of individuals.

Chinese leaders’ rejection of the universality of human rights is also increasingly evident through China’s foreign policy. In a chilling indication of its longer-term agenda to weaken key human rights institutions, in March 2018, China succeeded in advancing a resolution at the Human Rights Council, focusing on its vision for “win-win cooperation,” while omitting any role for independent civil society, any mention of accountability, and other core elements of



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the Council's mandate. Beyond its own borders, Beijing has pressed other governments, including France, to forcibly return asylum seekers and refugees to China, and stepped up harassment of diaspora communities. It arbitrarily detains foreigners in China, including Swede Gui Minhai, without due process. And China is pressing ahead with its "One Belt, One Road" initiative without mechanisms for human rights due diligence, consultation with affected communities, or labor rights, including in EU member states.

France has raised strong concerns about some of these issues, most recently through China's Universal Periodic Review at the UN Human Rights Council, but the results have not been promising. France urged China to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, to end mass arbitrary detention in Xinjiang and allow an unrestricted visit by UN experts, and to abolish the death penalty. China rejected each of these proposals. France also advanced recommendations regarding LGBTI rights, respect for freedom of religion in Tibet and Xinjiang, and human rights broadly in Hong Kong. China claimed without basis that it is already respecting those.

It is critical for you to publicly challenge China's leaders on such matters. It is the only way to ensure the audience that most needs to hear those interventions – people across China – have a chance to know of such advocacy. When pressed on human rights, Chinese officials often respond with vague reassurances; having a meaningful, actionable dialogue on these matters requires raising specific cases or issues and noting those publicly. Given the scope and scale of violations by the Chinese government today, it will be woefully inadequate not to raise publicly France's specific, serious concerns. Finally, we often hear the argument that Chinese leaders dislike to "lose face" as a way to explain why foreign governments did not publicly criticize their human rights abuses. Should the French government consider pursuing this strategy, I can only urge that you place equal consideration on the "face" of the countless number of people tortured, wrongly imprisoned, or otherwise persecuted by President Xi and his government.

I urge that you use the occasion of the forthcoming summit to publicly challenge President Xi to:

- Allow meaningful access to Xinjiang for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and other UN representatives, consistent with recent calls by France and the European Union;
- Immediately and unconditionally release wrongfully detained human rights defenders and peaceful critics, including Gui Minhai, Huang Qi, Wang Quanzhang, Guligeina Tashimaimaiti, Ilham Tohti, Tashi Wangchuk, and Li Ming-che;
- Abolish the death penalty;
- Reverse China's anti-rights conduct at the UN and with Interpol; and

- In light of the disappearance of former Interpol chief Meng Hongwei in China in 2018, inform Chinese leaders that France will undertake a thorough review of all law enforcement cooperation with a view towards suspending it in areas in which China seems unwilling to abide by international human rights protections.

In August 2017, you asserted that France’s diplomatic and economic interests with China “cannot justify cover-up of the question of human rights.” Since that time, the situation in China has deteriorated dramatically, despite bilateral human rights dialogues and interventions at the UN. With the visit of President Xi to France, you have before you an opportunity to demonstrate your past commitment – I urge you to seize it.

I look forward to discussing these issues at your convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ken Roth', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ken Roth
Executive Director
Human Rights Watch