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August 4, 2016

Re: G20 Summit in China and Human Rights Concerns

Dear G20 Member Governments,

I am writing on behalf of Human Rights Watch regarding your participation in the G20 Summit in Hangzhou, China in September 2016. We urge that you and other like-minded governments privately and publicly express your concerns that China, in its capacity as host of this year's G20 Summit, has seriously undermined established practice by obstructing the participation of diverse and independent civil society and labor organizations.

It is to the G20's credit that it has expanded participation in the Summits from representatives of governments to include civil society (the "C20"), labor (the "L20"), and other affected communities. Like the G20, we share the belief that more diverse participation is critical to making effective, transparent policy. We commend the G20 for recognizing a role for these groups in helping determine policy on issues ranging from inequality and political participation to strategies to combat corruption. At past gatherings, hundreds of independent civil society and labor representatives—including those critical of the host government—have been able to participate in a responsible, open manner.

Since President Xi Jinping assumed power in China in 2013, the authorities have carried out their most ferocious crackdown on civil society, labor, and religion in more than a decade. Dozens of nongovernmental organizations have been arbitrarily forced to close and their leaders prosecuted on spurious charges, or otherwise silenced. Members of the civic group known as the New Citizens Movement, best known for its campaign to combat corruption, were early victims of the campaign; nine of its members were imprisoned in 2014. About two dozen rights lawyers and activists remain detained on state security charges one year after the police interrogated more than 300 human rights lawyers, legal assistants, and rights activists around July 9, 2015. Independent labor activists, including Zeng Feiyan and Meng Han, remained detained after police took into custody a dozen labor rights activists from four workers organizations

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in Guangdong Province on December 3, 2015. And beginning January 1, 2017, China's police—not civil authorities—will become the arbiters of whether foreign civil society groups can work with or fund domestic organizations under a draconian new law.

Chinese authorities' hostility toward human rights has permeated its preparations for the G20. China did not agree to host a C20 until late April, and even then did not clarify when or where the gathering would take place. In mid-June, Chinese authorities disseminated to a limited audience information regarding registration, yet that process only remained open for 10 days—and for a gathering that was only confirmed for July 4-5 in Qingdao. Some representatives from international organizations that have participated in past C20s applied but were not extended invitations; some representatives from a given group were invited to participate while others were turned down. Chinese state media subsequently claimed that more than 200 representatives of civil society groups from more than 50 countries participated, yet there is no publicly available list of those groups. It is also unclear whether independent Chinese groups were able to participate. We urge that you regard the C20 communique with skepticism, as it is difficult to see it as a true reflection of the views of independent domestic Chinese and global civil society.

Independent international labor organizations faced similar challenges at the L20. While some were able to participate, few were given substantive speaking roles, were able to interact freely with independent domestic activists, or were allowed to contribute to a substantive communique. And in another step backward from past practice, the L20 participants will not be invited to participate in the September Summit.

Hangzhou also has been a prime target in the government's campaign against freedom of religion. In recent years dozens of unregistered "house churches" there have been shuttered, and state media has just announced a ban, effective immediately, on all "large-scale religious gatherings," contending that doing so is essential in order to "safeguard security" for the Summit. There is no publicly available explanation as to how such gatherings could present a security threat to the Summit. Conversely, state media has reported the deployment of more than 2,000 students and teachers from the central Public Security University to help provide security for the event; such use of untrained but politically beholden individuals is problematic.

As a result, this year's Summit is already deeply compromised by the Chinese government's conduct with respect to the C20 and the L20, tarnishing the G20's accomplishments. It should be unacceptable to G20 members that established practice be so significantly undercut by a single member. China's hostility toward independent voices should not be allowed to pass unnoticed, particularly by governments that have already

publicly expressed concern about Beijing's crackdown.

We urge you to respond to these developments by working with other G20 members to privately and publicly criticize these regressive actions by the Chinese government. In addition, we hope that your government makes an extra effort to consult with representatives of independent civil society and labor organizations left out of this year's discussions, and to strengthen efforts to ensure robust participation by these voices—particularly those from China—at next year's gatherings. Finally, we urge you to make use of any bilateral discussions your government will have with senior Chinese officials on the sidelines of the G20 to call for an immediate end to the attacks on civil society and labor in that country.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Sophie Richardson', written in black ink.

Sophie Richardson
China Director
Human Rights Watch