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January 5, 2018

Mr. Emmanuel Macron
President of the French Republic
55 Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré
75008 Paris, France

Re: Visit to China and human rights concerns

Dear President Macron,

We write on the occasion of your forthcoming visit to China. The values of liberty, democracy, and equality which you have asserted will be at the core of French foreign policy, are under extraordinary assault in President Xi Jinping's China. There is no liberty for Liu Xia, the arbitrarily detained widow of 2010 Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo, who died surrounded by state security officers in July, or for many other peaceful activists. There was no justice for those like the late dissident writer Yang Tongyan, who along with countless others, was imprisoned for years for protesting peacefully at Tiananmen Square in 1989. And there is surely no equality for religious and ethnic minorities such as the Uyghurs, whom the Chinese government reflexively treats as "extremists, separatists, and terrorists."

In one of your early speeches outlining your foreign policy principles and goals, you asserted that France's "diplomatic and economic exchanges with...China cannot justify the cover-up of the question of human rights because [to do so would be to] betray ourselves." In our experience, Chinese officials do not like but respect frank interventions on human rights, taking them as indication of how firm a given government will be on a host of issues. Yet, during his November visit to China, Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian appears to have failed to address this critical "question of human rights." There are no reports of any public comments, and scant evidence of private interventions, regarding human rights. This indicates a weakness of resolve and denies people across China—the real agents of change—the opportunity to see France speaking out in defense of their rights.

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Moreover, you have noted that, “our security, our interests, and our values have never been so challenged for decades.” Human Rights Watch hopes that concern extends to the Chinese government’s and Chinese Communist Party’s human rights abuses beyond its borders. We have documented their efforts to undermine human rights mechanisms at the United Nations, to manipulate Interpol’s Red Notice system, and to influence academic freedom at universities around the world, including in France. As we pointed out in a November letter to Foreign Minister Le Drian, we remain extremely concerned about so-called voluntary repatriations of Chinese nationals from France to China; it remains unclear whether those being sent back have had an adequate opportunity to contest their deportation, or whether French authorities are giving consideration to the likelihood of ill-treatment upon return. We are particularly concerned about the case of former business executive Zheng Ning, whom Chinese authorities compelled to return from France in February, apparently without the knowledge or cooperation of French police.

We urge that during your visit you follow through on your commitment to expose rampant human rights violations in China, in part by articulating ahead of the trip your specific concerns about human rights, and how ending those is crucial to France’s bilateral relationship.

While in China we ask that you:

- Publicly reiterate France’s call for full freedom of movement for Liu Xia;
- Meet with members of independent civil society if it is possible to do so safely, and publicly express concern about repression of such activists if it is not safe to meet;
- Urge your Chinese counterparts to address the underlying grievances of Uyghurs as the situation in Xinjiang rapidly deteriorates with respect to religious freedom, freedom of expression, the right to cultural identity, and political rights;
- Inquire with your Chinese counterparts how French companies can operate in China given increasing censorship of the internet and restrictions on Virtual Private Networks (VPNs);
- Express concerns about China’s anti-rights conduct at the United Nations and with Interpol; and
- Inform your Chinese counterparts that France will undertake a thorough review of all law enforcement cooperation with a view toward suspending it in areas where China appears unwilling to abide by international human rights protections.

You have already articulated France's commitment to a vigorous defense of human rights globally, and the Chinese government will make its calculations about your commitment to this issue based on whether you raise these issues on your upcoming visit. We urge that as you meet with Chinese leaders, you bear in mind that which you have proclaimed France holds dear and they deny to people across China: liberty, democracy, equality.

We wish you a successful trip and look forward to discussing these issues at your convenience.

Sincerely,



Bénédicte Jeannerod
France Director
Human Rights Watch



Sophie Richardson
China Director
Human Rights Watch