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September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2015

Dr. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka  
Executive Director  
UN Women  
220 East 42nd St.  
New York, NY 10017

Re: Women's Rights in China

Dear Executive Director Mlambo-Ngcuka,

Human Rights Watch is an international nongovernmental organization that monitors and reports on human rights abuses in more than 90 countries around the world. We have worked to improve the human rights of women in China for more than two decades.

We write now regarding the "Global Leaders' Meeting on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A Commitment to Action," which will be co-hosted by UN Women and the Chinese government on September 27, 2015, including opening remarks by Chinese President Xi Jinping. The event will mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the historic 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which established key benchmarks for promoting women's and girls' rights, and paved the way for important international obligations on the rights of women in armed conflict.

This anniversary carries both great symbolic and historical significance and is a stark reminder of how much work is needed for the fulfillment of the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action. Dozens of heads of state have pledged to announce concrete commitments to gender equality at this event, and it is critical that they move beyond high-profile public speeches to dedicated and sustained effort on the ground.

Given the leadership role that China is playing by co-chairing this historic event, we urge that you press Chinese leaders to make important and urgently needed commitments to protect women's rights domestically, including by immediately ending their repression of women's rights activists, and enacting comprehensive legislation that establishes meaningful protections for victims of domestic violence. We also urge you to provide a prominent speaking slot at the event for an independent women's rights activist from China.

In the past two decades, the Chinese government has taken some steps toward better ensuring women's rights. The rise of civil society groups and activists



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working on women's rights in China, despite government restrictions, has also contributed to greater awareness about gender equality. In March 2015, for example, the Supreme People's Court and other agencies issued instructions requiring judges to consider domestic violence as a mitigating circumstance in criminal cases against victims of such violence.

At the same time, however, Chinese authorities have not significantly reduced some of the most fundamental human rights abuses against women and girls, and in some respects have exacerbated them. China's family planning policies continue to impose arbitrary constraints on women's reproductive rights, and in some cases are imposed with extreme brutality, including through involuntary insertions of intrauterine devices, late-term forced abortions and sterilizations. The government continues to monitor the reproductive status of many women through mandatory, routine gynecological examinations. Those applying for civil service jobs are often required to undergo these examinations as part of their job applications, and those who have violated family planning rules are threatened with losing these jobs. Discrimination in employment and professional advancement against women is pervasive.

Since coming to power in March 2013, President Xi's government has unleashed the most severe crackdown on civil society across China in more than a decade. In the past year alone, hundreds of lawyers, civil society leaders and members, writers, anti-corruption activists, and other peaceful activists have been harassed, arbitrarily detained, and prosecuted simply because authorities deemed their views and activities objectionable. In March 2015, as you know, 10 feminists were detained for planning to raise awareness about sexual harassment on public transportation. Five of them – Wu Rongrong, Li Tingting, Wei Tingting, Wang Man, and Zheng Churan – were held for the maximum 37 days with limited access to their lawyers and family members until they were finally released on bail, though the charges are pending. The Chinese government has also vowed to punish Yirenping, a nongovernmental organization with whom the five are affiliated, for “unlawful activities.” Other female human rights defenders, such as prominent journalist Gao Yu and human rights lawyer Wang Yu, are in detention or prison for defending human rights.

These deeply worrying trends have a chilling impact in China but also send the wrong message from a government that will co-host a signature event on women's rights globally.

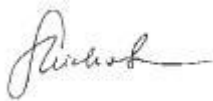
To avoid seriously undermining a strategic moment to reaffirm and catalyze governments' commitments to end entrenched discrimination and violence against women, and to support brave activists like Gao Yu and Wang Yu who are fighting for human rights at grave personal risk, we urge that you invite a prominent women's rights activist from China currently in the United States to address the September 27 gathering, and expand opportunities for civil society to participate. We also urge that you plan to publicly call on President Xi to drop the charges against the “Feminist Five” and other wrongfully charged women's rights activists. These steps are crucial to fulfill your mandate to defend women's rights activists and women's organizations worldwide, and to maintain the credibility of this event.

We look forward to discussing this important matter with you at your convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Liesl Gertholtz".

Liesl Gertholtz  
Executive Director, Women's Rights Division

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Sophie Richardson".

Sophie Richardson  
China Director, Asia Division