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**In Memoriam (1935–2019)*

October 31, 2019
Emmanuel Macron
President of the French Republic
55, rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré
75008 Paris

Re: Upcoming visit to China

Dear President Macron,

I write on behalf of Human Rights Watch regarding your forthcoming visit to China.

Under President Xi Jinping, the Chinese government is arbitrarily detaining approximately one million Turkic Muslims, crushing peaceful activism, and refusing to honor its commitments to Hong Kong people's human rights. Despite overwhelming evidence of these and other systemic human rights violations, many world leaders still pursue only "quiet diplomacy" with China, even as they would be outspoken toward comparable abuses in other countries. Yet because this quiet persuasion only reaches government officials and not ordinary people across China, it has done little to generate pressure on President Xi to change course and reverse the downward spiral of human rights during his tenure.

We appreciate France's support for European Union initiatives and its critical stance toward China at the United Nations Human Rights Council. However, we urge that you use your forthcoming visit to publicly and unambiguously call on President Xi to close the "political education" camps in Xinjiang, free peaceful critics of the government, and commit to respecting the human rights of the people of Hong Kong.

Since your March meeting with President Xi, Chinese officials have continued to claim that all those arbitrarily detained in the western region of Xinjiang—home to 13 million Turkic Muslims—are simply availing themselves of "vocational education," and that the government's strategy, purportedly to combat terrorism, is highly successful. We appreciated France joining, along with 24 other states, a letter to the UN Human Rights Council president in July reiterating support for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to have access to the region, and France's support to reiterating those concerns this week at the Third Committee of the General Assembly. You have the opportunity to elevate the request for access during your visit, underscoring the importance of the collaborative effort.

Given the limited Western pressure being brought to bear on China for these grave violations of human rights, China's leadership has shown no sign of changing their approach to Xinjiang and the treatment of the Turkic Muslim population.



The European Parliament's decision to award the 2019 Sakharov Prize to imprisoned Uyghur economist Ilham Tohti—serving time on a “separatism” conviction for his work promoting Han-Uyghur dialogue—highlights the importance of clear calls to release those wrongfully detained or imprisoned. Chinese authorities reject EU External Action Service lists of those whom China should release, lists that have continued to grow since that practice was established. Yet this rejection of diplomatic avenues simply underscores the need to call publicly on President Xi to immediately release Ilham Tohti, lawyer Wang Quanzhang, and activist Chen Jianfang, among many others. Just this week, Huang Xueqin, an activist who has written about Hong Kong's pro-democracy protests, was detained.

After more than two decades of efforts to advance universal suffrage, ensure free speech, and maintain the autonomy that Beijing guaranteed via the Sino-British Joint Declarations, the people of Hong Kong are now in their fifth month of protests to defend their human rights. Those protests have largely been carried out peacefully, yet we are particularly concerned about police excessive use of force and the denial of fair trial rights to those arrested, as well as violence by some protesters. As for the rights and freedoms at stake, the Hong Kong authorities have proven unresponsive on most key issues. You have expressed strong support for democratic rights in countries ranging from Sudan to Venezuela, and you have raised concerns about China's abiding by its international agreements. We urge that you speak out in defense of Hong Kong people's rights to political participation, peaceful assembly, and free expression, and that you call on the Chinese government to respect their obligations under international law.

In August 2017, you asserted that France's diplomatic and economic interests with China “cannot justify cover-up of the question of human rights.” In your most recent speeches to French ambassadors, the UN General Assembly, and the Council of Europe, you stressed the urgent need to “defend the strength and vitality of human rights that have weakened so much in recent years” in a context of impunity, and to “show courage” in defending them. The courage to confront serious and large-scale violations against people solely for their ethnicity, religions, or their democratic aspirations should not fade when it comes to China. We urge you to use the occasion of your visit to China to demonstrate in practice your strong and important words.

I look forward to discussing these issues at your convenience.

Sincerely,

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

Kenneth Roth
Executive Director
Human Rights Watch