



UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
Palais Wilson
52 rue des Pâquis
CH-1201 Geneva, Switzerland.

1 April 2022

Dear United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet,

We are writing to you today to draw your attention to an issue that is of great importance.

According to media reports, you will be visiting the Uyghur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang in China later this year to see first-hand the situation on the ground. We sincerely hope that you and your staff will, indeed, be given unfettered, meaningful access, including unsupervised interviews with civil society.

In this context, we would like to raise the case of the well-known Uyghur scholar Ilham Tohti. He was arrested in early 2014 and sentenced to life imprisonment for separatism on 23 September 2014 after a two-day trial. Ilham Tohti, who dedicated his life to promoting dialogue and understanding between ethnic Han Chinese and Uyghurs, did not support independence or separatism in Xinjiang. He has been a victim of a fundamental authoritarian change in China that targets alternative voices and opinions that do not conform to the guiding ideology of the Chinese Communist Party. The sentencing of Ilham Tohti is indeed a loss for China and for relations between the Han people and members of the various ethnic minority groups in China.

The European Parliament has recognised the important contribution of Ilham Tohti and awarded him, in absentia, the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize, the EU's highest human rights-related award. We care deeply for Ilham Tohti, who we consider a prisoner of conscience and a voice of reason, and do dearly hope that your visit to Xinjiang may also contribute to improving his fate. The European Parliament has been calling for his unconditional release.

Ilham Tohti has disappeared in the Chinese prison system. According to our knowledge, his family has not been able to contact him for a long time. Jewher Ilham, his daughter, has been campaigning for him internationally, but it is not known even to her whether he is still alive.



We therefore ask you, dear High Commissioner, to raise this issue with your Chinese interlocutors, to request a visit with Ilham Tohti, to plead for access to him by family members and to support our demand for his unconditional release.

Sincerely,

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Yannick Jadot, Greens/EFA (France)
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