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HIGH REPRESENTATIVE
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To all MEPs signatory to the letter on the issue of ratification of ILO Conventions by China

Dear Honourable Members of the European Parliament,

Thank you for your letter of 29 April regarding the announcement that China has decided to ratify two fundamental International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions, namely the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) and the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105).

The EU attaches great importance to the ratification and implementation of ILO fundamental conventions, including those related to forced labour, in line with the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, as recently reinforced by the 2019 ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work. In this spirit, the EU has, for many years, encouraged China to take the necessary steps towards the ratification and effective implementation of these conventions.

China's decision brings the world closer to the universal endorsement of both conventions. The ratification process, however, will not be complete and produce effects under international law until the transmission of the formal ratification instruments by China to the Director-General of the International Labour Office and during the subsequent 12 months, during which China will need to ensure its full compliance, both in law and practice, with the ratified conventions.

China's ratification will need to be reflected on the ground, by fully aligning Chinese laws, regulations and policies with the standards included in the conventions, as well as taking effective and concrete action against forced labour.

Once completed, China's ratification will enable the supervisory system of the ILO to regularly monitor and examine the application of forced labour standards in China and to issue observations on any deficiencies in the implementation.

I assure you that the EU will continue to closely monitor and assess the human rights situation in China, including as to the reported practice of forced labour, particularly in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region.

Let me add that, on 23 February 2022, the Commission adopted a proposal for a Directive on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence¹. The proposal requires companies operating in the EU market to identify and address any actual or potential adverse human rights impact (including those

¹ COM(2022)71 final

stemming from forced labour) in their operations and value chains. The adoption of the future Directive will be an important step to enhance compliance with international human rights and labour rights standards.

As part of a comprehensive approach to supply chain sustainability, the Commission is preparing a new legislative instrument to effectively ban products made by forced labour from entering the EU market, as announced by President von der Leyen in her State of the Union address of 2021. This instrument will cover goods produced inside and outside the EU, combining a ban with a robust enforcement framework. It will build on international standards and complement existing horizontal and sectoral EU initiatives.

Finally, let me answer your question on the 110th session of the ILO International Labour Conference. The investigation into alleged violations of labour rights and standards in the treatment of Uyghurs and other ethnic minority groups in China will be discussed in the context of China's implementation of the ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), as a separate agenda point. Please be assured that the EU will take a clear stance by delivering a joint statement on behalf of the EU and its Member States, calling for the full implementation of the observations made by the ILO's Committee of Experts.

Yours faithfully,



Josep Borrell Fontelles