



September 9, 2015

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama,

We write regarding the state visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping on September 24-25, 2015. Our organizations have worked to help promote and defend human rights in China for decades, and are deeply concerned by the significant erosions to rights during President Xi's tenure.

We appreciate your administration's expressions of concern about the deteriorating human rights environment in China. Yet we believe that in light of the high-level reception that will be given President Xi, whose leadership is responsible for this human rights crisis, inviting representatives of China's persecuted rights advocates to the White House continues to be essential and appropriate.

One of the primary targets of the Chinese government's hostility is also one of the country's greatest human rights success stories in recent years: an independent and increasingly vocal civil society. In the face of risks ranging from arbitrary detention, torture, harassment of family members, and being disappeared, members of these groups have pushed for urgently needed transparency at national and local levels. It is these individuals who have reported courageously on official wrongdoing. It is this community that has provided legal counsel, and public health services, and spearheaded campaigns against discrimination and for the rights of diverse groups, ranging from ethnic or religious minorities to persons with disabilities.

In other words, they share not only many of your administration's goals for positive change in China, they also share many of your own experiences: they are community organizers, law professors and legal practitioners, devout members of religious communities, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, and peaceful activists for positive change. Yet the Chinese government under President Xi has launched an assault against this community with a ferocity unseen in the past two decades, perceiving and treating them and their efforts as fundamental threats to the state. Between mid-July and mid-August, more than 250 members of China's fledgling community of human rights lawyers were targeted by police in a coordinated sweep across the country; while most were quickly released, the community is now noticeably less outspoken. Most ominously, 22 lawyers or legal activists continue to be held, 15 in criminal detention or "residential surveillance" at locations unknown, while seven disappeared


into police custody. A number of non-governmental organizations have been forced to shut their doors as a result of legally baseless official harassment; writers and journalists are being silenced through spurious charges and prosecutions; and religious practitioners continue to be jailed and their places of worship closed or demolished. We believe the draft foreign non-governmental organization management law is designed in part to deprive this community of critical international funding. Other recently drafted or passed legislation including the State Security Law, the draft Counterterrorism Law, and the Cybersecurity Law, frame peaceful criticism of the government as a threat to state security. Few people in this community believe the situation is likely to improve under President Xi's tenure, which is set to continue until at least 2022.

We appreciate the efforts your administration has made to raise and demonstrably assist individual cases, urge the Chinese government to withdraw rights-eroding legislation, and meet at lower levels with independent voices from China. Yet those are not proving sufficient to change Beijing's behavior, and we believe it imperative that you now quite literally visibly stand with independent Chinese civil society by inviting members of that community into the White House in advance of President Xi's visit. We believe that visibly demonstrating support and solidarity for that community may bring individuals or their organizations relief from persecution, and in turn also protect their efforts on legal reform, the freedom of expression and religion, and other issues critical to a healthy, predictable US-China relationship.

We believe that President Xi cannot leave Washington without having received a clear, public message from you that his government must end its persecution of civil society. We urge that in advance of President Xi's visit you accomplish that goal by welcoming peaceful lawyers, writers, activists, and religious leaders into the White House and thereby stand with civil society against Beijing's repression.

We look forward to discussing this matter with you.

Sincerely,



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China Director  
Human Rights Watch



T. Kumar  
International Advocacy Director  
Amnesty International USA



Bob Fu  
President  
China Aid



Mark P. Lagon  
President  
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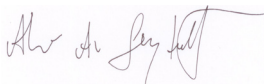
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