Xi Jinping

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Dear President,

I am writing to convey to you my deep concern about the plight of the prominent Uighur economics professor and writer Ilham Tohti.

Professor Ilham Tohti was sentenced on 23 September 2014, after a politicised trial that was marred by numerous procedural irregularities. He is now serving a life sentence solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression, a right enshrined in the Chinese Constitution, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which China signed in 1998 and has repeatedly said it would ratify.

Although Ilham Tohti was openly critical of government policies in Xinjiang and towards Uighurs, he consistently opposed violence and worked peacefully to build bridges between ethnic communities in accordance with Chinese laws. He was the founder and director of the bilingual website “Uighur Online”, which reported on human rights violations suffered not only by Uighurs but also by ethnic Han Chinese.

I believe that Ilham Tohti is a prisoner of conscience. I have been informed that he has been beaten and ill-treated during his time in prison. I also realise that his detention is part of a policy of repression against the Uyghur people, huge numbers of whom have been subjected to intrusive surveillance, arbitrary detention, political indoctrination and forced cultural assimilation on a massive scale in recent years, including mass detention in ‘re-education camps’.

I therefore plead with you, as we enter his eighth year of detention, to release Ilham Tohti immediately and unconditionally in the light of your country’s commitment to respect for human rights. I also urge you to ensure that, while Ilham Tohti remains in detention, he is not subjected to torture or other ill-treatment, and that he has access to legal representation of his choice, his family and any medical care he may require.

Yours sincerely,