Mr Josep Borrell Fontelles

EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs

and Security Policy/

Vice-President of the European Commission

European Commission

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Dear High Representative / Vice-President,

Please find attached a copy of the letter I have written to President Xi Jingping of the People’s Republic of China in support of Mr Ilham Tohti, the well-known Uyghur academic, who has been in detention since 2014 and is serving a life sentence on separatism charges. As part of a campaign launched by ACAT Italia (Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture), I am also appealing to you to step up EU action in support of Ilham Tohti, 2019 laureate of both the Vaclav Havel Human Rights Prize and the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, and to speak up against the appalling human rights situation in Xinjiang.

I have been appalled to hear of the way China is intensifying its campaign of mass internment and forced political and cultural assimilation against the region’s Uyghurs and other predominantly Muslim ethnic groups. It is estimated that over one million people are held in mass detention and forced labour camps, referred to by the Chinese authorities as ‘re-education and vocational training camps’. The EU must take every possible form of action to ensure that the Chinese authorities relent on this policy of systematic human rights violations. As you have repeatedly stated, respect for human rights and the rule of law forms the foundation of the EU’s international cooperation policy. Improved trade relations with China must not be achieved at the expense of people’s basic rights. I am deeply concerned that such considerations may be pushed into the background by the current determination to forge ahead with the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment.

I therefore urge you:

* to call on the Chinese authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Ilham Tohti and all other human rights activists detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their freedom of expression, and to close the ‘re-education camps’,
* to insist that the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights be allowed to visit Xinjiang and, in particular, be granted unfettered access to all detention camps in the region,
* to ban products manufactured in Chinese ‘re-education camps’ from EU markets,
* to bring consistent pressure to bear on the Chinese authorities at the highest level to honour their recent commitment to ‘make continued and sustained efforts’ with a view to ratification of all ILO fundamental conventions on forced labour,
* to take action, as a matter of urgency, on the other demands contained in the European Parliament’s resolutions of 19 December 2019 and 17 December 2020 on the situation of Uyghurs in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region.

Yours sincerely,