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EUROPEAN UNION GAGGED BY CHINA WITH OFFERS OF TRADE DEALS

GENEVA -- The European Union (EU) is caving in to pressure from the Chinese government not to criticise the country's human rights record, Amnesty International said today. Despite agreeing to propose a resolution on China at the United Nations (UN) Commission on Human Rights, EU officials have failed to reach agreement on their position.

"France and Germany are pushing the EU to take a more conciliatory approach towards China," Amnesty International said. "This follows the recent EU/Asia summit in Bangkok, where lucrative trade deals with China were discussed."

"France is the main proponent of this policy, and it is surely no coincidence that Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng will visit France in April," the organization said. "The only conclusion must be that in a bid to increase its business with China, France is prepared to break with Europe's supposed long-standing commitment to promote and protect human rights throughout the world."

The Commission will soon be half way through its six-week meeting in Geneva and the EU is still sitting on its hands. Other countries at the Commission are expecting a clear signal from the EU, but the EU is lost in China's shadow, Amnesty International said.

The Chinese government is acutely sensitive on human rights and will go to any lengths to block criticism and scrutiny of its appalling record. It seems as though the EU is prepared to toe the Chinese line that its human rights record should not be held up to scrutiny.

UN experts have voiced concerns about patterns of torture in China, have concluded that prisoners have been arbitrarily detained in violation of international human rights standards, and have stated their concern about violations of the right to life in China.

"Despite the wealth of evidence about the systematic violation of human rights in China, the EU seems willing to fudge a backroom deal to let China off the hook," Amnesty International said.

"What message does this send to the people of China? That the EU is prepared to condone the Chinese authorities continuing to torture them with impunity, continuing to detain hundreds of thousands of people each year without charging them with any offence, continuing to execute them after blatantly unfair trials, and continuing to brutally crack down on anyone they see as a threat to the established order."

Amnesty International calls on the member states of the European Union to publicly state that they are working for a resolution, and actively support it. The resolution should explicitly call for the cessation of torture, the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience, an end to arbitrary arrests, imprisonment and unfair trials, and the abolition of the death penalty.

“The Chinese government is not content with silencing those who speak up in China,” Amnesty International said. “Their message is loud and clear: no discussion about our human rights record. Anywhere, by anyone, at any time.”

“Will European Union, and in particular France, happily accept this position and remain silent in the hope of reaching a few more trade deals?”

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