

EU-CHINA Summit: Human Rights Situation in China Remains Disturbing

(Brussels, 7 September) Despite the commitment made at last year's Summit to protect and promote human rights, China continues to engage in practices that involve gross human rights violations, says Amnesty International ahead of the EU-China Summit on 9 September. In a briefing paper (available at www.amnesty-eu.org) the organization presented its main human rights concerns to the EU.

“The EU needs to make China understand that its international credibility is affected when it does not match promises with actions. China's indifference to its commitments is a type of defiance towards international opinion which the EU cannot ignore”, said Dick Oosting, Director of Amnesty International's EU Office.

The widespread use of the death penalty in China remains a key concern. The exact number of executions in 2005 is a mystery. The organization's findings point to 1,770 but it could be as high as 10,000.

Prisoners are executed by shooting, usually to the back of the head. Increasingly, death sentences are also carried out with "mobile execution vans" by lethal injection, a practice which Amnesty International is concerned may facilitate the extraction of organs from executed prisoners.

The authorities have taken no steps to reform or abolish the provisions of Chinese criminal law which are frequently used to arbitrarily arrest lawyers, journalists and human rights activists. Thousands of people continue to be held without charge or trial in “Re-education through Labour” facilities, up to four years. Torture and ill-treatment also persist.

Censorship and a general crackdown on the media has continued over this past year, assisted by international internet companies such as Google, Yahoo and Microsoft. This raises serious doubts over China's commitments to ensure “complete media freedom” at the Beijing Olympics.

In a letter to EU leaders, Amnesty International also raised the fact that despite China's growing influence in international affairs, it has failed to assume the responsibilities of such a role. Emerging as a major arms producer, China refrains from entering multilateral agreements that set out criteria to guide arms export controls.

“The sale of military equipment by Beijing to Sudan is a practical example of a foreign policy that flouts human rights. Through these sales, instead of helping to search for peace, China is effectively fuelling violence in Darfur”, said Oosting.