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MEDIA ADVISORY
Open letter from Amnesty International to EU governments
on the eve of EU-China human rights dialogue

As European Union (EU) governments prepare for their next round of human rights dialogue with China on 8 February 1999, Amnesty International's Secretary General, Pierre Sané, today wrote to all member states urging them to reevaluate the process in the light of "one of the most disturbing crackdowns in China in the past decade".

More than 70 dissenters have been detained and at least 15 high profile dissidents given heavy prison sentences or assigned to "re-education through labour" since October 1998. A widespread crackdown on suspected Uighur nationalists and independent Muslim leaders continues in Xinjiang. Reports persist of the torture and death in custody of prisoners of conscience in Tibet and an ongoing "patriotic education" campaign involving closure of monasteries or the expulsion of "unpatriotic" monks and nuns. Unofficial Christian groups also reported intensified repression at the end of 1998, involving numerous arrests.

These developments strike at the heart of the EU and other human rights dialogues and call into question China's sincerity in signing key human rights conventions in 1997 and 1998. They represent a serious setback on many of the core issues the EU and others have claimed to be pursuing and highlight China's contempt for international opinion and its sense of security from international censure. Mr Sané warned that there was a risk EU governments were becoming hostage to a dialogue process that is not producing results. The very effectiveness of dialogue will be compromised if the EU abandon other forms of pressure, including at the UN Commission of human rights. Amnesty International is therefore calling on all EU governments to:

- I. protest recent developments in China publicly and unequivocally;
- II. take preparatory steps towards tabling a resolution at the forthcoming Human Rights Commission highlighting concerns and the need for concrete progress;
- III. evaluate the dialogue progress, with a view to
 - setting concrete objectives and a time frame for their achievement;
 - improving public accountability and reporting on the content of dialogue sessions;
 - ensuring the format of dialogue allows for the greatest possible diversity of participation on both sides;
 - improving coordination with other dialogue partners (such as the US, Australia and Canada) to avoid duplication and maximize effect.

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To receive a copy of the letter, or to arrange an interview, please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 171 413 5566/5729, or +44 468 670 247.