

AI INDEX ASA 17/01/00

**EMBARGOED FOR 00.01 HRS GMT, MONDAY, 24 JANUARY, 2000**

## **EU must not shy away from chance to speak up for China's oppressed**

Amnesty International urges European Union foreign ministers, meeting in Brussels today and tomorrow, to take an early and unequivocal decision to censure China at the UN Commission on Human Rights (CHR).

"The crackdown on peaceful dissent in China is becoming harsher by the day. A weak and divided response from the international community is a disservice to the victims, since it allows Beijing to act with virtual impunity," the human rights organisation said.

"EU officials must surely have taken note of the spate of unfair trials carried out in China in the past few weeks. Sentences passed recently against followers of the Falun Gong movement have been among the most draconian in recent years. Political dissidents, labour rights campaigners, religious groups and members of ethnic groups in Tibet and Xinjiang continue to be targets of severe repression," Amnesty International pointed out.

"The EU has tried to engage China through high-profile attempts at dialogue, but dialogue cannot be meaningful if it has no impact on the human rights situation, which has steadily deteriorated since the end of 1998."

In this context, the decision by the United States, earlier this month, to sponsor a resolution on China at the annual meeting of the CHR, starting in March in Geneva, was welcomed by Amnesty International and other human rights groups.

"A similar decision by the EU would send out a powerful signal to Beijing that dialogue will not be promoted at the expense of human rights, and will also encourage other member-states of the CHR to join the effort to speak up for human rights in China," Amnesty International said.

"It will drive home the message that the standards applied to China are no different from those applied to smaller, less powerful countries that blatantly violate human rights and are regularly censured by the international community for their human rights record."

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**For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on 44 171 413 5566 or visit our website at <http://www.amnesty.org>**