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EU-China: Javier Solana must press the Chinese foreign minister over human rights: Amnesty International reports growing harassment of activists in China

(Brussels Wednesday 16 March, 2005) Amnesty International has today drawn the attention of the EU's High Representative for CFSP, Javier Solana, to its latest research which shows that harassment and imprisonment of activists attempting to defend civil, political and economic rights in China is on the increase with cases reported in just the past few weeks.

Javier Solana is due to meet the Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing in Brussels tomorrow, at a time when the EU has made it clear that it will soon lift its 16-year old arms embargo against China, which Amnesty International recalls was originally imposed to send a strong signal to China on human rights after the brutal crackdown in Tiananmen Square.

"If the EU is to have any credibility at all on the world stage, it cannot allow this meeting to pass without making it crystal clear, both privately and publicly, that China cannot continue to lock up human rights defenders," Dick Oosting, Director of Amnesty International's EU Office in Brussels said.

"If Mr. Solana fails to give a strong signal that China's unrelenting repression of peaceful activists has no place in the modern world, not only will the EU have lost a key opportunity to exert leverage on the Chinese leadership, but will also have seriously undermined EU human rights policy in Asia, and the rest of the world," he said.

Amnesty International last week published an update to its December 2004 report on the risks faced by human rights activists in China which shows that since the last EU-China summit in December, harassment of human rights defenders in China has increased. (see: *People's Republic of China: Human Rights Defenders at Risk: Update on <http://www.amnesty-eu.org>*).

Activists who have been harassed or imprisoned include those working in the area of housing rights, religious rights, labour rights and land rights. As recently as the past 10 days, activists have been rounded up in an apparent attempt to limit any impact they might have during China's National People's Congress. In late January, one of the leaders of the "Tiananmen Mothers" was placed under a form of house arrest.

"The EU cannot make statements to the effect that human rights are improving in China without looking at this evidence. The Chinese leadership needs to give an undertaking to the EU that it will release human rights activists from jail and stop harassing them," said Dick Oosting.

"We call on Javier Solana to demand such an undertaking on behalf of the EU. Otherwise, what message is the EU sending to Chinese activists who are struggling for the most basic rights?"

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