



22 January, 2026

The Rt Hon Sir Keir Starmer, KCB KC MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London SW1A

Dear Prime Minister,

We are writing ahead of your expected visit to Beijing, to urge you to take a principled, strategic approach to relations with China, prioritizing the human rights crisis across China in your discussions with Xi Jinping and other Chinese government officials. In particular, this must include seeking the immediate release of British citizen Jimmy Lai from prison in Hong Kong. We strongly believe that promoting human rights, rather than solely focusing on trade, would be consistent with a clear defense of Britain's values and national interests.

As you are aware, 78-year-old Hong Kong media entrepreneur and pro-democracy campaigner Jimmy Lai has spent the past five years in prison in Hong Kong, mostly in solitary confinement, on a series of trumped-up charges. Most recently, on December 15, 2025, he was convicted under the draconian National Security Law of conspiracy to collude with foreign forces, and also of conspiracy to publish seditious material under the Crimes Ordinance. He faces a minimum sentence of 10 years and potentially a life sentence. As his family and his international legal team from Doughty Street Chambers have highlighted in recent months, his health is rapidly and significantly deteriorating. Given his age and failing health, there are significant fears that he may die in jail. As Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, it is your primary responsibility to do everything possible to secure the release of this British citizen, and so we urge you to make his case the top priority in your discussions in Beijing. Furthermore, given the critical nature of his case, we call upon you not simply to raise his case, but to set out to Beijing clear, robust and practical consequences for China and for UK-China relations if he is not released.

We also encourage you to express the UK's broader concerns about the dismantling of human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Hong Kong, especially since the imposition of the draconian national security laws, in clear violation of the Sino-British Joint Declaration. We call on you to seek the release of all other political prisoners in Hong Kong, including the barrister Chow Hang-tung and trade unionist Lee Cheuk-yan, who have been jailed simply for commemorating the 1989 Tiananmen massacre.

We urge you also to express the United Kingdom's profound concerns about the continued imprisonment of prisoners of conscience in mainland China, and to seek the immediate release of human rights defenders Xu Zhiyong and Ding Jiaxi, Chinese-born publisher and Swedish national Gui Minhai, citizen journalist and lawyer Zhang Zhang, and pro-democracy activist Dr Wang Bingzhang, among others.

As you engage with the Chinese government, we urge you to address the crimes against humanity and genocide against the Uyghur people. The Uyghur Tribunal concluded beyond reasonable doubt that Uyghurs are subjected to genocide through forced sterilization, forced abortion, and deliberate reduction of births, alongside crimes against humanity including mass detention, torture, child separation, forced indoctrination, restrictions on religious freedom, and cultural destruction. Scholars such as Ilham Tohti, a Uyghur economist, scholar, and advocate for peaceful dialogue who was sentenced to life imprisonment in 2014 after criticizing Chinese government policies toward Uyghurs; Professor Rahile Dawut, a renowned Uyghur anthropologist and expert on Uyghur culture and religious traditions who disappeared in 2017 and was later confirmed to be sentenced to life imprisonment; Yalqun Rozi, a Uyghur author, literary critic, editor and publisher who was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment; and countless others remain imprisoned or disappeared, while artists, writers, and religious figures are detained or have died in custody. Millions of Uyghurs have been forcibly removed from their homes and sent to factories across mainland China as slave labor, while millions more live under constant surveillance, trapped in what is described as the largest digital gulag of the 21st century. Even Uyghurs living in the UK are cut off from their families, with relatives criminalized or punished for activism abroad, leaving communities here under constant shadow and fear. We ask that you raise these cases, demand accountability for deaths in detention, insist on unrestricted international access, and take concrete steps to prevent Uyghur forced labor from entering UK supply chains.

We also urge you to address the situation in Tibet. Specifically, we recommend you to call explicitly for a return to substantive, direct dialogue between the Chinese government and representatives of the Tibetan people, with the basic human rights of Tibetans as the foundation for such a dialogue. We urge you to make it clear and unambiguous that the United Kingdom will only recognize a successor to His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama chosen by the traditional Tibetan process for identifying the reincarnation, as set out by His Holiness and conducted solely by the Gaden Phodrang Trust which His Holiness has designated for this purpose, and that any successor chosen by Beijing will not be accepted or recognized by the United Kingdom. We also urge you to demand an immediate end to the coercive residential school system that separates nearly one million Tibetan children from their families and prohibits Tibetan children from speaking their language, practicing their religion, and learning about their culture.

Furthermore, we ask you to demand the immediate and unconditional release of all Tibetan political prisoners, and to seek information about the whereabouts and well-being of the 11th Panchen Lama, forcibly disappeared at the age of five in 1995. In particular, we hope you will seek the release of Lhundrub Drakpa, a popular Tibetan singer from Driru County in Nagchu, central Tibet, who is serving a six year prison sentence for a song which criticizes Chinese Communist Party policies. We also urge you to raise the case of Dorje Tashi, among Tibet's most prominent entrepreneurs and a Communist Party member before his July 2008 arrest and sentencing to life imprisonment. Following his detention during a crackdown, apparently framed by senior officials, he endured torture so severe that prison guards reportedly wept and attempted to shield him from interrogators sent from Beijing. His life is in danger. We also recommend that you seek the release of imprisoned monks Gonpo Tsering and Jamyang Lekshay, treasurer and abbot respectively of Yena monastery in Derge, Sichuan (Kham), imprisoned for two years after peaceful appeals in February 2025 against the construction of a dam that would submerge ancient monasteries and villages. Gonpo Tsering was beaten so severely that he now has brain damage and there are fears for his life.

It is imperative that you raise the case of Zhang Yadi, a 22 year-old Chinese student who was studying in Paris and was due to come to the United Kingdom to study at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), but was arrested in China during a summer visit to her family on July 31, 2025. Zhang Yadi had been involved in an organization called Chinese Youth Stand for Tibet, which peacefully promoted understanding of Tibetan culture among Chinese students and harmony among different ethnic groups. She is believed to be held in a detention center in her hometown of Changsha, Hunan Province. Given the fact that she was due to study at SOAS, the United Kingdom has a responsibility to raise her case and demand her release.

Violations of freedom of religion or belief, and specifically the current intensifying crackdown on Christian churches, should also be a priority on your agenda for discussions with Xi Jinping. We urge you to express the United Kingdom's concerns, especially regarding the recent repression of Early Rain Church in Sichuan province, the Yayang Church in Zhejiang province, and Zion Church network throughout the country, and to demand the release of 18 members of Zion Church, including its founder Pastor Ezri Jin Mingri, at least 20 recently detained members of the Yayang Church, and Pastor Wang Yi, the founder of Early Rain Covenant Church, who is currently serving a nine-year prison sentence, as well as Li Yingqiang, the leader of the Early Rain Covenant Church, his wife and colleagues arrested earlier this month.

We also call upon you to address the issue of forced organ harvesting from prisoners of conscience in China, given the judgment of the independent China Tribunal chaired by Sir Geoffrey Nice KC which concluded that this practice continues, is widespread and systematic, and amounts to crimes against humanity against Falun Gong practitioners and Uyghurs. These grave violations of human rights have also been highlighted by United Nations Special Procedures. The Tribunal also found evidence that Falun Gong practitioners are subjected to enforced disappearance, torture, and other inhumane acts. In particular, we urge you to raise the case of Ms Wang Meihong, detained since 2020, sentenced to four years in 2021 and jailed in Heilongjiang Women's Prison. Ms Wang's daughter, Amy Minghui Yu, resides in London, and she has been advocating for her mother's release.

In addition to these extensive concerns regarding human rights in China, we also urge you to address the human rights crisis in Myanmar and North Korea, and Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine, during your visit to Beijing. These are situations where China has extensive influence and is complicit with facilitating egregious atrocity crimes committed by the regimes in both countries. We urge you to press China to abide by a global arms embargo on the junta in Myanmar, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2021, and to cease providing aviation fuel to the military in Myanmar. Furthermore, we call on you to urge the government of China to cease its policy of forced repatriation of North Korean refugees, which is a serious violation of international humanitarian norms and the principle of *non-refoulement*.

We are conscious that this is a lengthy set of concerns, but it reflects the extent and gravity of the human rights crisis across China and the regions under the Chinese Communist Party's control. We hope that you will take these concerns extremely seriously and make it a priority to discuss them substantively and at length with Xi Jinping and other senior officials, and to use your visit to work towards the release of the individuals mentioned in this letter, and others, suffering in prison today.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Benedict Rogers", with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Benedict Rogers
Senior Director, Fortify Rights

On behalf of:

Alliance for Citizens Rights
Article 19
China Aid
China Deviants
The Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong Foundation
CSW
Fortify Rights
Free Tibet
Friends of Falun Gong USA
Global Rights Compliance
Hong Kong Watch
International Bar Association Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)
International Coalition to End Transplant Abuse in China (ETAC)
Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
Safeguard Defenders
Stop Uyghur Genocide Campaign
UK Uyghur Community
Uyghur Solidarity UK
World Uyghur Congress