



February 17, 2021

Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Re: A Human Rights Approach to US-China Policy

Dear President Biden,

On behalf of 24 organizations and individuals devoted to improving respect for human rights in China, we write to urge your administration to make human rights a priority in US-China policy. We understand that the new administration is in the process of reviewing its approach to China, and we note and appreciate [remarks from you](#) and other senior officials, including National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and Secretary of State Antony Blinken, reflecting the gravity of Chinese government-inflicted human rights violations in Hong Kong and the Uyghur region/Xinjiang. We also appreciate your [condemnation](#) of racism against people of Asian descent in the United States.

The scope and scale of human rights violations committed by the Chinese government inside and outside the country require a fundamental shift; many of the tools previously employed are no longer relevant or sufficiently robust. We welcome senior officials' [statements](#) that the US government will hold the Chinese government "accountable for its abuses of the international system," and the suggestion that the US will impose consequences for serious violations.

To demonstrate that the United States will meet this challenge, we urge that you and your administration take the following steps:

- **Make human rights a priority in China policy.** The escalating and egregious abuses by the Chinese government should be one of the priority topics of discussion with President Xi Jinping and other Chinese leaders, and should be given credibility through your and other senior US officials' public commentary. When meeting with high-level Chinese officials, ask for the release of wrongfully detained individuals, for the reform of abusive laws, for internet and media freedom, and for international standards on human rights and fundamental freedoms to be upheld. The US should consider restarting the bilateral human rights dialogue only when independent civil society groups from China and the US can participate, and when specific objectives and outcomes can be publicly discussed.
- **Play an active role in international bodies that can promote human rights in China.** The Chinese government has weakened key international human rights bodies, most notably the United Nations Human Rights Council. It has rejected requests for visits by numerous Special Procedures, blocked access for civil society to the UN system through manipulation of the Economic and Social Council's NGO Committee, and failed to uphold International Labor Organization standards. We are encouraged by the [decision](#) to reengage with the Human Rights Council and step up support to its mechanisms; the US should spearhead a multilateral coalition of like-minded democracies to ensure that rights-respecting individuals and governments serve in key positions across the UN system. This coalition should also support independent civil society groups and human rights defenders' participation in UN action to advance international scrutiny of the Chinese government's rights record. Furthermore, the US should urgently support the June 2020 [call](#) by 50 UN human rights experts for urgent action on China, which could include a special session of the Human Rights Council, and the appointment of a special rapporteur to monitor and report on human rights violations by the Chinese government. The US should, finally, also urgently support an international investigation into human rights crimes against Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims in the Uyghur region/Xinjiang.
- **Focus on technology.** The US should take a principled global leadership role in technology by implementing comprehensive privacy legislation and reforming surveillance legislation, while working with like-minded governments to set rights-respecting standards in the collection of personal data and in the use of AI-enabled technologies. The US needs to work with rights-respecting countries to stigmatize the worst forms of mass data collection – the kind the Chinese government is promoting, such as facial recognition, racial profiling, and genomic surveillance. The US should put in place a series of escalating actions against technology companies found to be contributing to China's mass surveillance, including by imposing Global Magnitsky sanctions.
- **Provide strong and steadfast support to human rights defenders and civil society activists across China.** Prioritize building strong ties to and among activists, independent writers, journalists, scholars, lawyers, and leaders of persecuted ethnic and religious minorities, and commit to assisting them when they are targeted for their

activism. We also urge that you engage their counterparts now in the United States. Human rights improvements in China will come from within, and these are the key players.

- **Treat the 2022 Olympics as a diplomatic matter.** Given the Chinese government’s grave human rights violations and the International Olympic Committee’s unwillingness to carry out human rights due diligence around the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, refrain from sending high-profile or senior officials to the Games. The administration should also begin to brief athletes and others attending the Games on the risks they face, particularly with respect to tech-enabled surveillance and severe restrictions on free speech rights in China.
- **Maintain existing targeted [sanctions](#).** Retain the sanctions on senior Chinese government officials and Entity List [designations](#) on Chinese companies and government agencies engaged in human rights violations. Target key government officials, state-run agencies, and companies, including state or military-operated businesses, credibly alleged to have committed serious human rights abuses, and seek legal accountability under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Act, the Tibetan Policy & Support Act of 2020, the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2020, and other laws and policies regarding violations in Hong Kong and the Uyghur region/Xinjiang. These sanctions will be significantly more effective if coordinated with other rights-respecting governments.
- **Counter Chinese government and Chinese Communist Party propaganda.** The US should counter state-driven views by giving independent Chinese media and influential independent opinion-makers priority access to senior US officials, and by investing in independent Chinese-language news platforms and technology to combat Chinese government censorship and cyber surveillance.
- **Choose words carefully.** Please ensure that, across the administration, public remarks and policies strictly differentiate between the Chinese government and the people, including ethnic minorities, across China. Condemning “China” for human rights violations incorrectly conflates the government and the people. Exercise similar caution and avoid restating key Chinese government propaganda points – many of which are factually inaccurate and excuse gross human rights violations, such as, “China lifted millions out of poverty.”

President Xi and his government are assaulting human rights on a scale unprecedented in decades. Your administration’s actions and responses will be critical to halting – and possibly reversing – that crisis. Our organizations look forward to working with you and your administration in this urgent undertaking.

Sincerely,

Julie Millsap | [Campaign For Uyghurs](#)
Teng Biao | [China Against the Death Penalty](#)

Bob Fu | [ChinaAid](#)
Jianli Yang | [Citizen Power Initiatives for China](#)
Anna Lee Stangl | [CSW](#)
Dan Wang | [Dialogue China](#)
Annie Boyajian | [Freedom House](#)
Andrew Anderson | [Frontline Defenders](#)
Samuel Chu | [Hong Kong Democracy Council](#)
Benedict Rogers | [Hong Kong Watch](#)
Fengsuo Zhou | [Humanitarian China](#)
Sharon Hom | [Human Rights in China](#)
Sophie Richardson | [Human Rights Watch](#)
Andrea Worden | Independent Advocate
Tencho Gyatso | [International Campaign for Tibet](#)
Sarah Brooks | [International Service for Human Rights](#)
Mandie McKeown | [International Tibet Network Secretariat](#)
James Tager | [PEN America](#)
Peter Dahlin | [Safeguard Defenders](#)
Wang Tiancheng | [The Institute for China's Democratic Transition](#)
Renee Xia | [The Network of Chinese Human Rights Defenders](#)
Elfidar Iltebir | [Uyghur American Association](#)
Omer Kanat | [Uyghur Human Rights Project](#)
Kristina Olney | [Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation](#)

Cc:

Jake Sullivan, National Security Advisor

**Kurt Campbell, Deputy Assistant to the President and Coordinator for Info-Pacific Affairs,
National Security Council**

Laura Rosenberger, Senior Director for China, National Security Council

Shanthi Kalathil, Coordinator for Democracy and Human Rights, National Security Council

Antony Blinken, Secretary of State

Scott Busby, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

**Jonathan Fritz, Deputy Assistant Secretary for China, Mongolia, and Taiwan Coordination, Bureau of East
Asian and Pacific Affairs**

Lisa Peterson, Acting Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

Sung Kim, Acting Assistant Secretary, Bureau of East Asia and the Pacific