



Ambassador Qin Gang
Embassy of the People's Republic of China
3505 International Place NW, Washington DC 20008

Dear Ambassador:

Ilham Tohti, was, until his arrest, an economics professor at Minzu University of China in Beijing, the founder of the "Uighur Online" website, and a well-known commentator on China's ethnic and religious policies in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR). He was taken away from his home in Beijing on January 25, 2014 and sentenced to life imprisonment on September 23, 2014.

Ilham Tohti's wife, Gulzelnur, received the arrest warrant on February 25, 2014 telling her that Ilham, a prisoner of conscience, was being charged with "separatism," a charge used against Uighurs who speak out against human rights violations. She is under constant surveillance and at times has not been permitted to leave her home. Ilham Tohti's daughter, Jewher, lives abroad, unable to return to China for fear of reprisals for raising awareness about her father's detention.

Ilham Tohti has been commenting on the situation of Uighurs, who are a primarily-Muslim Turkic ethnic minority, concentrated in the XUAR.

Since the 1980s, they have been the target of systematic and extensive human rights violations, which include arbitrary detention and imprisonment, incommunicado detention, and serious restrictions on religious freedom as well as cultural and social rights.

Local authorities maintain tight control over religious practices, prohibiting all government employees and children under the age of 13 from worshipping at mosques. Chinese policies limit the use of the Uighur language and encourage an influx of Han migrants into the region, which erodes Uighur customs and together with employment discrimination, fuels discontent and ethnic tensions.

Tohti was first held at the XUAR Detention center in Urumqi. After his arrest, he went on a ten-day hunger strike to protest his need for food compatible with his Islamic dietary requirements. After a train station attack in Kunming, Yunnan Province, on March 1, 2014, in which 29 people died and the Chinese authorities blamed Uighur groups, Ilham Tohti was not given food for ten days and his feet were shackled for more than 20 days.

Ilham Tohti's lawyers, Li Fangping and Wang Yu, met him for the first time since his detention on June 26, 2014 and Li said that Ilham Tohti had lost 35 pounds. Wang Lu was later forced to

stop representing his client due to pressure from the authorities. Beijing human rights lawyer Liu Xiaoyuan later took up Ilham Tohti's legal representation.

Ilham Tohti opposes violence and separatism and only highlighted concerns about social and political issues as a Uighur academic. He has continued to be shackled in prison and told his lawyers that he has discomfort on his right side, pain in his abdomen, and may have a cataract. He has not had a medical exam and was not receiving any treatment. He also told his lawyers that he was harassed and punched by two inmates and cried when he talked about his children.

Ilham Tohti's sentence was upheld by the Xinjiang People's Court on November 21, 2014, which his brother was able to attend, but his lawyers were not given sufficient notice to attend. Tohti was then transferred to XUAR No.1 Prison on December 12, 2014. His lawyers are appealing to the Supreme People's Court and are also requesting that Ilham Tohti serve his sentence in Beijing, where his wife lives.

We ask that Ilham Tohti be released immediately and unconditionally; that prison authorities not torture or ill-treat him; that he has regular access to his family and lawyers, independent medical examinations and any treatment he needs.

Yours sincerely,

Name _____

Address _____

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