



Brussels, 14 February 2018

Dear President Juncker,
Dear High Representative Mogherini,

FIDH and the International Campaign for Tibet write to you with regard to the 2018 EU-China Tourism Year (ECTY), which was launched in Venice last month and consists of a number of events throughout the year, aimed at boosting visitors' flows and investments on both sides.

We recognize the historical importance and the significance of Chinese culture for the world and the contribution that such an initiative can have for greater people-to-people exchanges and understanding. We are also aware of the economic opportunities it opens for both EU Member States and China.

However, we are deeply concerned about the promotion of tourism in Tibet, which takes place amid a security crackdown of unprecedented severity. We are also concerned about the issue of access to Tibet. While Chinese tourists enjoy free and open access to the EU, citizens from EU Member States are not granted unfettered access to Tibet. In addition, restrictions are imposed on Tibetans' freedom of movement, limiting their ability to conduct cultural and religious activities, such as going on pilgrimage.

We would like to raise the following issues of concerns in relation to the promotion of tourism in Tibet:

- As the number of self-immolations by Tibetans exceeds 150,¹ indicating the Tibetan people's profound anguish at Chinese oppression, the Chinese authorities are seeking to brand Tibet as a romantic 'Shangri La' destination. Chinese authorities are implementing a strategy to bring large numbers of Chinese and international tourists to visit scenic sites and cultural icons of Tibet and receive a version of history and traditions manipulated by Beijing and its state-trained guides.
- While the Chinese government is marketing Tibet as a tourist destination based on the spiritual attractions of its Buddhist culture and landscape, Beijing has tightened its control over Tibetan religious expression and practice. The authorities' commodification of Tibetan culture is part of the trend towards increasing repression of Tibetan culture, traditions, and identity.
- The presence of global hotel chains in Lhasa and other parts of Tibet provides support for Beijing's claim of normalcy and 'harmony' in Tibet. This represents a new threat to Tibet's religious culture and national identity, which risks increasing the marginalisation and exclusion of the Tibetan people, and raises concern about the impact of untrammelled tourism on the Tibetan plateau's fragile landscape.
- Unfettered access to Tibet for European citizens and other foreigners remains highly restricted. Every year since peaceful protests swept across Tibet in March 2008, the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) remains closed to foreign tourists for around a month. China has allowed a limited number of visits and delegations to travel to Tibet, but participants are closely monitored and have few opportunities to meet local residents beyond those approved by the authorities. Access is even more difficult for exiled Tibetans who wish to travel to Tibet to visit their families and friends or to do business. The visa application process they have to go through is long and complex, and they often face strong pressure and even blackmailing from the authorities.

¹ Since 2009, more than 150 Tibetans in Tibet have set themselves on fire in protest against China's policies – details at: <https://www.savetibet.org/resources/fact-sheets/self-immolations-by-tibetans/>

- Very few Tibetans in the TAR and in many other Tibetan areas have been issued passports in the past few years, and many had their passports confiscated, in breach of China's law.² The restrictions on travels outside of Tibet is used as a form of collective punishment, and the families and friends of certain individuals, such as former political prisoners or people associated with Tibetans who have self-immolated or participated in protests, can also see their passports' application denied or their passports cancelled. The denial to issue passports is accompanied by restrictions on movement in Tibetan areas, which is linked to intensified militarization in areas where there have been protests or self-immolations.
- In recent years, Chinese authorities have imposed new sweeping measures in order to prevent Tibetans from travelling to attend teachings by the Dalai Lama abroad, and to punish those who do. For example, in 2017, Chinese authorities forced thousands of Tibetan pilgrims to return to Tibet after travelling to India to attend a major teaching by the Dalai Lama in the sacred Buddhist site of Bodh Gaya, India. This follows systematic measures to prevent Tibetans in Tibet from travelling out of China at all, even though many waited for years to obtain passports for legal travel.³
- We believe that only by fully involving Tibetans in any decision-making process and implementation of policies aimed at encouraging tourism to Tibet the objectives of generating economic benefits, improving local living standards, and protecting the environment of the plateau can be achieved. Tibetans should be the primary beneficiaries of revenues from tourism, the main employees of tourism enterprises, and, above all, the guides and story tellers who explain Tibet's culture and values to visitors. Tourism can also play a critical role in promoting cross-cultural dialogue and understanding between Tibetans and Chinese. European investors in tourism in Tibet – such as hotel chains – should do their part in ensuring the active participation of Tibetans in the tourism industry and protecting authentic Tibetan culture.
- Our organisations welcome the enhancement of tourism between the EU and China, which will certainly be beneficial for both sides. However, as noted by the European Parliament (EP) in its 2015 report on EU-China relations, the restrictions imposed on EU citizens or on European-Tibetan citizens wishing to travel to certain areas of Tibet do not exist for Chinese citizens who are granted visas to travel to EU Member States or within the Schengen area. In recent months, the EU has been calling for reciprocity with China in the area of trade and, in its 2016 Strategy on China, mentioned the objective to «*[P]romote reciprocity, a level playing field and fair competition across all areas of co-operation*».⁴ This notion of reciprocity should therefore be extended to the respect for fundamental rights, including the freedom of movement and the freedom of information of European citizens in China and Tibet.

During a debate on ECTY in Strasbourg in November 2017, a number of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) questioned the moral implications of celebrating a tourism year with China without a single reference to human rights. Given the EU's commitment to mainstream human rights and freedoms in all areas of its external policy, we would like to know whether and to what extent the human rights situation in Tibet has been part of the discussions around this EU-China Tourism Year.

Lastly, following the announcement last May by Commissioner Avramopoulos of the launch of negotiations between the EU and China for a visa facilitation agreement, we would also be interested to know whether the issuing of visas to citizens from EU Member States of Tibetan descent has also been included into this negotiation process. Chinese authorities have announced that from 1 February 2018, foreigners of Chinese background will be allowed to apply for multiple-entry visas that permit them to stay in China for up to five years, provided they meet certain criteria. Is this new development also part of the ongoing discussion with the EU and could it affect the EU-China visa facilitation agreement?

² *A Policy alienating Tibetans: The denial of passports to Tibetans as China intensifies control*, International Campaign for Tibet, 13 July 2015, <https://www.savetibet.org/policy-alienating-tibetans-denial-passports-tibetans-china-intensifies-control/>

³ *Tibetan pilgrims compelled to return from Dalai Lama teaching in Bodh Gaya, India; China calls the teaching 'illegal'*, International Campaign for Tibet, 9 January 2017, <https://www.savetibet.org/tibetan-pilgrims-compelled-to-return-from-dalai-lama-teaching-in-bodh-gaya-india-china-calls-the-teaching-illegal/>

⁴ *Elements for a New Strategy on China*, Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, 22 June 2016, http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/china/docs/joint_communication_to_the_european_parliament_and_the_council_-_elements_for_a_new_eu_strategy_on_china.pdf

ICT and FIDH look forward to your feedback on the steps taken by the EU to address these concerns, and remain available should you need any additional information on the above-referenced issues.

Yours sincerely,



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Gaelle Dusepulchre
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Cc:

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