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PUBLIC STATEMENT

LATEST DEVELOPMENT
September 23, 2024

China should release Uyghur scholar Ilham Tohti

Amnesty Freedom calls on China to release Ilham Tohti, the Uyghur economist whose platform encouraged discussion between Uyghur and Han Chinese communities.

What we know

A court convicted Ilham Tohti of separatism in September 2014 and sentenced him to life imprisonment. Rights monitors documented serious concerns about the prosecution and describe his published work as advocating peaceful dialogue. The European Parliament awarded him the Sakharov Prize in 2019. On September 23, 2024, the tenth anniversary of his sentencing, the European Union's High Representative renewed the call for his release. [1–6]

Our position

Ilham Tohti was jailed for advocating dialogue between communities. Peaceful expression is not separatism, and no one should be imprisoned for it. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights protects freedom of opinion and expression, and families have a right to know where a prisoner is and how they are. [3, 6–8]

Our calls

Amnesty Freedom calls on the authorities to:

1. End Tohti's imprisonment for peaceful expression.
2. Pending release, disclose his whereabouts and condition to his family.
3. Ensure confidential access to a lawyer and appropriate medical care, and permit regular family contact.
4. Review prosecutions of others for their association with his work.

Supporting information

1. China: Further information: Uighur academic sentenced to life: Ilham Tohti - Amnesty International
2. China: Xinjiang Verdict Upholds Unjust Life Sentence | Human Rights Watch
3. Ilham Tohti - Committee to Protect Journalists
4. China: Statement by the High Representative on the 10th anniversary of the sentencing of Sakharov Prize winner Ilham Tohti | EEAS
5. China: Free Uyghur Economist Ilham Tohti From Life Sentence | Human Rights Watch
6. Ilham Tohti | Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission
7. United Nations, Nelson Mandela Rules on the treatment of prisoners
8. United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

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Note to editors: *This statement is based on the public sources listed above. The date shown is that of the most recent development recorded in those sources; later developments may not be reflected.*

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