

The Right Honourable Justin  
Trudeau, P.C., M.P.  
Prime Minister of Canada  
80 Wellington Street  
Ottawa, ON, K1A 0A2

The Honourable Stéphane Dion,  
P.C., M.P.  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
125 Sussex Drive  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0G2

The Honourable Chrystia  
Freeland, P.C., M.P.  
Minister of International Trade  
125 Sussex Dr.  
Ottawa, ON K1A 02G

October 5, 2016

Dear Prime Minister and Ministers,

We, the undersigned organizations and supporters, call on the Canadian government to put human rights, especially free expression and press freedom, at the heart of the “renewed” Canada-China relationship.

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang arrived on Parliament Hill on September 22 to continue talks with Prime Minister Trudeau, during which an agreement was signed by the two countries to begin exploratory talks on a [Free Trade Agreement](#). Discussions of a proposed [extradition treaty](#) also continued, which provoked swift outcry in Canada after its announcement on September 13.

China is one of the worst perpetrators of crimes that silence the voices of activists, [journalists](#), artists and others who exercise their [right](#) to freedom of expression. The country’s [culture of impunity](#), where rights violations go [unpunished](#), is systematic, endemic and ever-growing. China has one of the highest numbers of [imprisoned journalists](#) in the world and is among the top ten most censored countries in the world, according to the [Committee to Protect Journalists](#). It is ranked fourth worst—176<sup>th</sup> out of 179 countries—on Reporters Without Borders’ 2016 [World Press Freedom Index](#).

In light of China’s atrocious human rights environment, simply acknowledging that China and Canada “have different systems of law and order,” as Prime Minister Trudeau did during his [press conference](#) with Premier Li, is not acceptable. The very nature of fundamental human rights is that they transcend national borders and apply to all humans equally, regardless of their citizenship.

Chinese officials frequently object when any criticism is made of their human rights record by foreign governments, [insisting](#) that the country has made “tremendous and universally recognized achievements in the protection and promotion of human rights.” The advancement of human rights depends upon a free press to disperse accurate information, expose corruption and wrongdoing, and give voice to the powerless. As long as the government of China can with [impunity](#) engage in broad [crackdowns](#) on dissent, [kidnap](#) Hong Kong booksellers for publishing books critical of Chinese leaders, [repress](#) Uyghur Muslims, [punish](#) lawyers who dare to defend dissidents, and [intimidate](#) diaspora journalists in Canada, there can be no true progress.

Canada must not conveniently forget this in the name of increasing trade and currying favour with China. “Honest, regular engagement” with China must include an engagement with, and consideration for, the Chinese citizens who risk their lives and [personal freedom](#) to secure the liberties we are guaranteed by birth. We urge you to put human rights at the heart of the Canada-China relationship. Specifically, we ask you to raise with the Chinese government the cases of the [49 journalists](#) imprisoned simply for carrying out their professional duties, and to call for their immediate release.

Above all, we ask that you call on China to prioritize journalists' safety in all interactions with law enforcement and security forces.

We thank you for your attention and look forward to your reply.

Signed,

Canadian Journalists for Free Expression  
Adil Soz - International Foundation for Protection of Freedom of Speech  
Afghanistan Journalists Center  
Albanian Media Institute  
Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain  
ARTICLE 19  
Association of Caribbean Media Workers  
Cartoonists Rights Network International  
Centre for Free Expression, Ryerson University  
Committee to Protect Journalists  
Council of Canadians  
CWA-SCA Canada  
Fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec (FPJQ)  
Freedom Forum  
Free Media Movement  
Human Rights Watch  
I'lam Arab Center for Media Freedom Development and Research  
Independent Journalism Center - Moldova  
Instituto de Prensa y Libertad de Expresión - IPLEX  
Instituto Prensa y Sociedad de Venezuela  
International Press Institute  
Media Institute of Southern Africa  
Media Watch  
National NewsMedia Council (Canada)  
OpenMedia  
Pacific Freedom Forum  
Pacific Islands News Association  
Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms - MADA  
PEN American Center  
PEN Canada  
PEN International  
Reporters Without Borders  
South East European Network for Professionalization of Media  
Vigilance pour la Démocratie et l'État Civique  
Writers' Union of Canada's (TWUC)