

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 30, 2025

Honorable Jørgen Watne Frydnes
Chair
Nobel Peace Prize Committee
Henrik Ibsen Gate 51, NO-0255
Oslo, Norway

Dear Honorable Frydnes and Members of the Nobel Peace Prize Committee:

We, the undersigned members of the United States Congress, respectfully nominate Uyghur scholar **Ilham Tohti**, ethnic Mongol activist **Hada**, Chinese Protestant pastor **Wang Yi**, journalist **Sophia Huang Xueqin**, and entrepreneur and democracy advocate **Jimmy Lai** to receive the 2025 Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of their deep commitment to human rights and peace in China. All five of these human rights leaders are arbitrarily detained, serving long sentences for exercising rights guaranteed them by international law.

Ilham Tohti and Jimmy Lai have been nominated for the Peace Prize previously, and both deserve significant global recognition as champions of peace, freedom, and human rights. We nominate the others named here for the first time, recognizing their immense courage for standing up for greater women's rights, religious freedom, and the cultural and linguistic rights of ethnic minorities in China.

This year, the PRC flagrantly disregarded criticism of its human rights record at the UN's Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Egregious violations of human rights including the mass internment camps in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (Uyghur Region); the often brutal dismantling of networks of human rights lawyers seeking legal and political reforms in China; and the imposition of a National Security Law in Hong Kong that has led to the unjust detention of over 1,000 people--only Belarus and Burma have jailed more political prisoners over the past four years.

Awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to these individuals, who have stood up for the rights of others at great personal cost to themselves and their families, would send a signal that the desire for peace and freedom of those living under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party is no different than that expressed by billions of other people around the world.

Ilham Tohti

The work of Uyghur scholar Ilham Tohti embodies the peaceful struggle for human rights and the rule of law in China, and his work is even more relevant in light of the atrocity crimes committed by Chinese authorities in recent years in the Uyghur Region. As a professor at Minzu University in Beijing, Tohti courageously voiced concerns about government policies toward Uyghurs and other ethnic groups in the Uyghur Region, calling upon authorities to fully abide by existing laws on ethnic autonomy and to reduce economic discrimination against ethnic minority groups. He was also committed to promoting inter-ethnic dialogue, including through Uyghur Online, the website he founded. In 2014, Tohti was detained at his home in Beijing and formally charged with “separatism.” Later that year, he was sentenced to life in prison in a trial marred by egregious procedural violations. Even after being sentenced to life in prison, he issued a statement through his lawyer that “peace is a heavenly gift to the Uyghur and Han people. Only peace and good will can create a common interest.” In the years since his trial, authorities have subjected him to periods of solitary confinement and restricted visits from his family.

Hada

Mongol rights advocate Hada has faced harassment and detention in retribution for his efforts on behalf of ethnic Mongols in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (Mongolian Region). Hada was first imprisoned in 1995 and given a 15-year sentence on the charges of “separatism” and espionage after he organized peaceful protests for the rights of ethnic Mongols. While in prison, officials denied him proper medical treatment and subjected him to routine physical abuse and other forms of maltreatment. Officials continued to hold Hada without legal basis for four years following the expiration of his sentence in December 2010, and finally released him in December 2014, in very poor health. Officials also subjected Hada’s wife Xinna and their son Uiles to periods of detention and intense surveillance, and restricted their movements, in an effort to silence their public expressions of concern over Hada's situation. He was placed under home confinement following August 2020 protests in the Mongolian Region over a new policy removing Mongolian-language instruction from schools in the region and remains detained.

Wang Yi

Pastor Wang Yi is one of China’s most powerful voices in China for the freedom of religion and conscience and the ability of people of faith to build civil society networks to both practice their faith and contribute to the public good. In December 2018, he was detained one day before PRC officials banned his unregistered Protestant church, the Early Rain Covenant Church, amid a broader crackdown against Chinese churches that

had remained independent of state control. Pastor Wang was detained along with more than 100 members of his congregation. Authorities refused to allow the lawyer hired by Wang's family to represent him at his trial, ultimately sentencing him to nine years in prison and three years' deprivation of political rights on the charge of "inciting subversion of state power." Since his initial detention, officials have only allowed Wang a single visit with his wife, Jiang Rong, and have continually prevented him from having any contact with his son. As of December 2024, the Chinese officials denied Pastor Wang visits or communication with his family for nearly a year, constituting mistreatment of a prisoner according to international standards and violating PRC law. In 2019, the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention determined that Wang Yi had been arbitrarily detained.

Sophia Huang Xueqin

Veteran journalist and women's rights advocate Sophia Huang Xueqin is known for her work exposing sexual harassment and her coverage of the Hong Kong anti-extradition protests. Most recently, in 2020 Huang began to participate in and later help labor activist Wang Jianbing to organize private gatherings in Guangzhou to discuss civil society development. Authorities placed Huang and Wang under "residential surveillance at a designated location," a coercive custodial measure whereby individuals may be held up to 6 months in incommunicado detention which leaves the detainees vulnerable to torture and abuse. Both were later formally arrested on the criminal charge of "inciting subversion of state power." In September 2023, Huang was tried in a secret hearing, and in June 2024, she was sentenced to 5 years in prison, a fine of 100,000 yuan, and 4 years' deprivation of political rights. She repeatedly refused to plead guilty, stating in her trial that she did not seek to subvert state power but to help the country become better. Her attempt to appeal the verdict was denied in September 2024.

Jimmy Lai

Jimmy Lai Chee-ying is the founder of the now-defunct news organization Apple Daily. On August 10, 2020, Hong Kong police took Mr. Lai into custody on suspicion of "collusion with a foreign country or with external elements to endanger national security" under the National Security Law (NSL) and "conspiracy to defraud." On the same day he was taken into custody, police also detained nine other individuals, including Mr. Lai's two sons and other democracy advocates and newspaper executives. Police did not disclose the specific facts underlying the NSL charge, and did not explain why the fraud charge, which was based on an alleged breach of a commercial lease, rose to the level of a criminal offense. Observers have said the arrests were authorities' efforts to suppress press freedom and to intimidate pro-democracy advocates.

Authorities formally charged Mr. Lai under the NSL on December 11, 2020 and he has mostly remained in detention since that time. Trial proceedings were ongoing as of December 2024, during which Mr. Lai denied that he advocated for Hong Kong independence but asserted that Hong Kongers were fighting for previously guaranteed freedoms and against the PRC government's encroachment on the city's autonomy.

Mr. Lai was denied the right to be represented by legal counsel of his own choosing and suffered a range of custodial mistreatments, including denial of access to independent medical care and prolonged solitary confinement, with only 50 minutes for restricted exercise and limited access to daylight.

We hope that the Nobel Committee will continue to shine a light on those struggling for peace and human rights in China and we believe Ilham Tohti, Hada, Wang Yi, Huang Xueqin, and Jimmy Lai are deserving of recognition this year.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Christopher Smith in blue ink.

Representative Christopher Smith
Member of Congress

Handwritten signature of Jeffrey A. Merkley in blue ink.

Senator Jeffrey A. Merkley
Member of Congress