

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 29, 2019

Berit Reiss-Anderson
Chair
Nobel Peace Prize Committee
NO-0255 Oslo, Norway

Dear Chair Reiss-Anderson and Members of the Nobel Peace Prize Committee:

We, the undersigned members of the United States Congress, respectfully nominate imprisoned Uyghur scholar Ilham Tohti to receive the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of his commitment to peaceful interethnic dialogue between ethnic Uyghurs and the Han Chinese majority in China. Despite Professor Tohti's dedication to nonviolence and reconciliation, in September 2014, a court in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), in northwest China, unjustly sentenced him to life in prison on the charge of "separatism." Professor Tohti's courageous work embodied precisely the kind of insight and guidance on interethnic problems that should be embraced by Chinese officials who have, instead, chosen to silence Professor Tohti and to embark on a massive crackdown on Uyghur intellectuals, the broader Uyghur community, and other Muslim groups in the XUAR.

As an economics professor at Minzu University in Beijing, writer, and founder of the website Uyghur Online (Uighurbiz), Professor Tohti long served as a leading voice in seeking to reduce ethnic tensions in the XUAR, where the majority of Uyghurs live. In order to mitigate rights abuses in the region, he urged Chinese officials to fully abide by existing laws regarding ethnic autonomy in the XUAR, reduce economic discrimination against Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities, and implement an independent legal system. Professor Tohti enlisted the help of young students of different ethnicities to run the bilingual Uyghur Online website, which provided a rare forum for forthright reporting on news developments and a scholarly exchange of views on problems in the XUAR. Seven of his students were, like him, later convicted of "separatism" and sentenced to prison, reportedly for terms of between 3 and 8 years.

Professor Tohti knew the risks he was taking by speaking and writing openly about ethnic policy and development in the XUAR. Prior to his imprisonment, Professor Tohti told the Voice of America that "even if I should die at the hands of the domestic security or state security police—don't think that I've been killed by Han people and let hatred come between our two peoples." Even after being sentenced to life in prison in September 2014, 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."

Chinese authorities long subjected Professor Tohti and his family to harassment and threats. On February 20, 2014, the Urumqi Municipal Public Security Bureau formally arrested him on charges of separatism. His September 2014 trial was marred by egregious procedural violations, and his lawyers stated that officials subjected him to abuse during his pre-trial detention, including by shackling him and depriving him of food and water. In the years since his

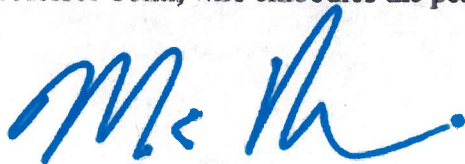
trial, reports have emerged that authorities have restricted visits from his family and subjected him to periods of solitary confinement.

Professor Tohti has been recognized with numerous honors and awards during his detention and imprisonment, including the PEN/Barbara Goldsmith Freedom to Write Award, in 2014, and the Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders, in 2016. In 2016, he was also nominated for the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. In 2017, he was awarded Liberal International's Prize for Freedom, in recognition of his "campaign of conciliation between Han Chinese and Muslim Uyghurs." In April 2014, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention issued a statement stating that he was being arbitrarily detained and called upon the Chinese government to "immediately release" him and "grant him compensation for the harm he has suffered during the period of his arbitrary detention."

Against the backdrop of recent developments in the XUAR, voices like Professor Tohti's are needed more than ever. Beginning in April 2017, Chinese officials have carried out the mass, arbitrary internment of as many as one million or more Uyghurs and other Muslim ethnic minorities in "political reeducation" camps in the region, in possibly the largest mass internment of an ethnic minority population in the world today. At the same time, Chinese authorities have enforced an unprecedented campaign of pervasive surveillance and mandatory "homestays," involving the extended stays of Communist Party officials in Uyghur and Kazakh homes in the XUAR. Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities are also subjected to highly disproportionate rates of arrest and criminal detention in formal detention facilities, which are not included in figures of detention in "political reeducation" camps. In recent years, officials in the XUAR have also rounded up hundreds of intellectuals and other prominent members of the Uyghur community, detaining them in both "political reeducation" camps and prisons.

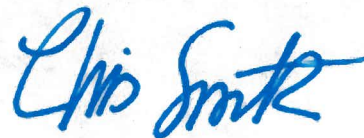
The unjust imprisonment of Professor Tohti echoes that of Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo, his compatriot, who sadly passed away in 2017 while in official custody. Like Liu, Professor Tohti is a determined champion of human rights, and his life's work demonstrates that freedom, due process, liberty, and the rule of law are not foreign ideas in China, but ones that eventually should be part of a more peaceful and prosperous future for China and the world.

We believe there is no one more deserving of the Committee's recognition in 2019 than Professor Tohti, who embodies the peaceful struggle for peace and human rights in China.



MARCO RUBIO
United States Senator

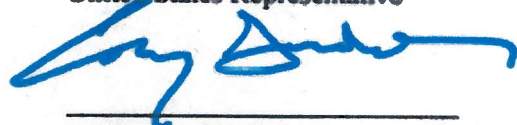
Sincerely,



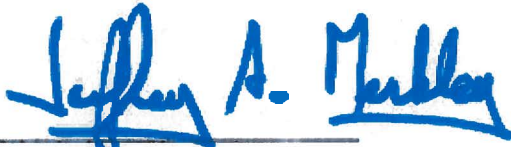
CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
United States Representative



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senator



CORY GARDNER
United States Senator



JEFFREY A. MERKLEY
United States Senator



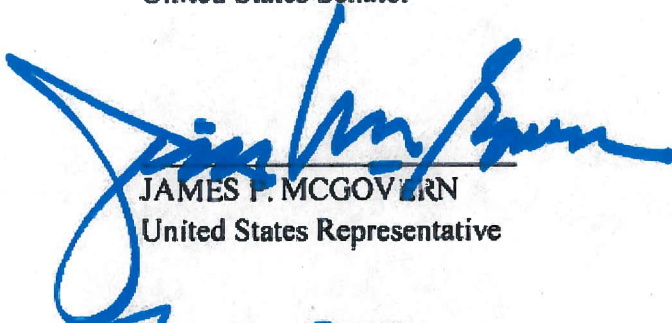
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United States Representative



JAMES P. MCGOVERN
United States Representative



JAMIE RASKIN
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