

HR/VP Josep Borrell
EEAS Building, 9A Rond Point Schuman
1046 Brussels
Belgium

Your Excellency,

I am writing to express my deep concern for the Chinese government's treatment of Falun Gong practitioners. On January 14th 2022, 11 followers of the Falun Gong faith were sentenced to prison for exercising their religion. One of these, poet and painter Xu Na was arrested for the third time, this time facing an eight-year-long prison sentence.

Falun Gong is a peaceful religious movement which started in China in the early 1990s. Its philosophy borrows from Buddhism, Taoism and traditional Chinese health practices focusing on meditation and physical activity. In the initial years, the movement quickly expanded to include millions of people. Alongside the rapid growth, the Chinese government, who initially had endorsed the movement, started considering it a threat to the nation. In 1999, practicing Falun Gong became illegal in China, and over the years thousands of its followers have been imprisoned and tortured for their faith, and several have died in prison due to unknown circumstances.

When the Covid-19 pandemic emerged, Xu Na photographed and documented the pandemic with other journalists belonging to the Falun Gong movement. She was arrested in July 2020, and after being detained for 15 months, her trial began in October 2021. On 14 January 2022, Xu Na received an 8-year prison sentence. Her lawyer, Liang Xiaojun, lost his license for representing Xu Na and other persecuted Falun Gong practitioners in court. Xu Na's late husband, Yu Zhou, was arrested when the state's persecution of Falun Gong increased during the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. He died in prison 11 days later.

I am writing to bring Xu Na's story to your attention, and strongly urge you to advocate to the Chinese government on behalf of persecuted and wrongfully imprisoned Falun Gong practitioners. Article 36 of the Chinese constitution states that 'Citizens of the People's Republic of China shall enjoy the freedom of religious belief'. I humbly petition you to use your influence to ensure that China is held accountable for its human rights crimes, and to urge the Chinese government to:

- immediately release Xu Na and drop all charges against her;
- stop the persecution of peaceful Falun Gong believers; and
- ensure the protection of the right to freedom of religion or belief for all citizens of China.

Sincerely,