[*INSERT Day, Month, Year]*

*[INSERT title, name, and address of the recipient]*

**Re: Request to release all imprisoned human rights defenders amid COVID-19**

Your excellency *[ADD title, position, and name of the recipient],*

We, the undersigned organisation, are writing to request the immediate release of all detained human rights defenders amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

On 28 March, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, called on governments and relevant authorities to urgently reduce the number of people in detention amid the ongoing pandemic. In her message, she said: “now, more than ever, governments should release every person detained without sufficient legal basis, including political prisoners and others detained simply for expressing critical or dissenting views.” This concerns, among others, human rights defenders, activists, and journalists who do not pose a risk to the public.

As stated by the [World Health Organisation](http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/pages/news/news/2020/03/preventing-covid-19-outbreak-in-prisons-a-challenging-but-essential-task-for-authorities), “people deprived of their liberty are likely to be more vulnerable to the COVID-19 disease”. Being incarcerated during this pandemic could be equivalent to a death sentence for detainees at risk of contracting the COVID-19 virus. For human rights defenders, it constitutes a form of further punishment for their legitimate actions. For all people in detention, the authorities must uphold the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, and provide higher levels of cell hygiene, appropriate access to healthcare, and sanitary facilities.

We acknowledge the important steps that have been taken to curb the spread of the virus, *([ADAPT sentence if applicable:] including the release/pardon of [ADD number] prisoners)*, but we must urge you to expand such measures and release all imprisoned human rights defenders. *These include [ADD names of defenders currently detained in your country].*

Sincerely,

*[ADD signature, name of the organisation, and stamp]*