

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CATALONIA TAKES SPAIN TO THE UNITED NATIONS

London, 1 February 2018: Three Catalan independence leaders have today lodged a case with the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, claiming that their imprisonment by the Spanish Government is unlawful.

Jordi Cuixart, Jordi Sanchez, and Oriol Junqueras were detained last year on unsustainable criminal charges as part of a crack-down on the peaceful Catalan independence movement. Parliamentarians and 100 Spanish law professors have confirmed that there is no legal basis for charging them with the crimes they are accused of, but repeated applications for their release from jail have been refused by the Spanish judicial system, and they have been left with no option but to take their case to the UN.

Leading human rights lawyer Ben Emmerson QC, who represents the detained men, says: “The three men were detained after Catalonians voted overwhelmingly for independence from Spain, in a referendum on 1 October 2017. In response, Spain brought unsustainable charges of sedition and rebellion against Catalonia’s political leaders, detaining those who remained in the country. Their detention by Spain is an affront to human rights, designed to prevent them from performing their role as political representatives of the Catalan people.

“This case does not ask the UN to adjudicate on the issue of Catalan independence, but seeks the UN’s reaffirmation that governments cannot repress political dissent through arbitrary detention. Spain must release these men. The actions of the Spanish government in this case set a dangerous precedent for the right to peaceful protest around the world. We hope that the United Nations uses this case to strongly re-iterate that governments cannot use flimsy charges to quell political opposition.”

Human rights lawyer Rachel Lindon, who also acts for the detained men, said: “Spain has detained our clients to prevent their peaceful political activity. Mr Sanchez and Mr Junqueras were both re-elected to the Catalan Parliament on 21 December 2017 and

have been prevented from taking up their seats. The Spanish authorities are acting like a dictatorship, imprisoning their political opponents and refusing to release them until they renounce their political beliefs and abandon their roles. This is an unacceptable breach of our clients' fundamental rights."

Lawyers in London, Barcelona and Paris have today lodged on the detained men's behalf an application with the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, claiming that Spain's detention of the applicants:

- Violates their right to freedom of association and freedom of expression
- Violates their right to political opinion and participation in public life
- Is in violation of fair trial rights, including the right to be tried by an independent impartial, and competent tribunal, the right to prepare a defence, and the right to the presumption of innocence
- Discriminates against them because of their advocacy for the rights of the Catalan people to self-determination.

The applicants' attempts to secure release through the Spanish courts are ongoing.

– END –

Contact: Sara Thomson, Matrix Chambers (London and Geneva)

Phone: +44(0)20 7404 3447

Email: sarathomson@matrixlaw.co.uk

Notes to Editors:

1. **Mr Jordi CUIXART I NAVARRO** is the president of OMNIUM CULTURAL, an association created in 1961 with the aim of protecting and preserving the Catalan language and culture. It currently has 95,000 members throughout Catalonia. He has been in pre-trial detention for over three months at the Madrid V prison.
2. **Mr Jordi SANCHEZ I PICANYOL** is ex-President of the Catalan National Assembly (ANC), and an elected deputy of the Catalan Parliament, representing the Junts per Catalunya party. He has been in pre-trial detention for nearly three months at the Madrid V prison.
3. **Mr Oriol JUNQUERAS I VIES** is the Vice-President of the Catalan Government and the Catalan Minister of Economy and Finance. He was Mayor of Sant Vicenç dels Horts from 2011 to 2015 and Member of the European Parliament from 2009 to 2012. He became president of Esquerra Republicana (ERC) in 2011 and member of the Parliament of Catalonia in 2012. He was head of list in the last elections of 21 December 2017 for his Party, Esquerra Republicana, and is an elected deputy of the

Catalan Parliament. He has been in pre-trial detention since 2 November 2017, at the Madrid VII prison.

4. The applicants are represented before the UN WGAD by Ben Emmerson QC (Matrix Chambers, London); Rachel Lindon (Paris); Jessica Jones (Matrix Chambers, London). They are represented in Spain by Marina Roig Altozano, Jordi Pina Massachs, and Andreu Ven Den Eynde (all Barcelona).