

Hague: 'Human rights to be at core of foreign policy'

[1 April 2011] On 31 March, the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) launched its 2010 Human Rights and Democracy Report. In his foreword to the report, Foreign Secretary William Hague wrote that the British government is committed to a "foreign policy that has the practical promotion of human rights as part of its irreducible core". Attending the launch, Tibet Society was encouraged by the government's intent to make human rights central to its foreign policy.

However, the government has to bring their sentiments to fruition with actions and not just words, in particular when dealing with China. During his address William Hague commented that there had been no significant progress on civil and political rights in China during 2010, going on to say, "the development of independent civil society and application of human rights under the rule of law are, in our view, essential prerequisites for China's long-term prosperity and sustainable growth."

Whilst Tibet Society agrees with these sentiments we urge the British government to not just speak but to act on these principles and proactively work to bring about change in China and Tibet. It is a very short-term policy to sacrifice the good heart and well-being of people simply to foster trade. Without consideration and engagement of the people, such agreements will be worthless in the future.

CEO of Tibet Society, Philippa Carrick, who attended the launch of the FCO report, commented, "I am encouraged by the Government's commitment and intent to put human rights at the heart of Britain's foreign policy and by the Foreign Secretary's reference to the interplay between trade and human rights and further comments that human rights and trade can go together. However, the government must now put measures into place to ensure human rights become mainstream rather than isolated in its own bubble at the margins of engagement, especially when dealing with China."

In his opening remarks, William Hague said, "We believe that human rights are universal and apply to all people, of every religion, ethnicity or culture, in all places and at all times. We do not accept the argument that democracy is not right for all peoples, even though there is more than one model of democracy. The yearning for freedom and for a life free from oppression has the power to move millions to fight back for themselves and for future generations, and is one that we will always support."

During the question and answer session following the formal presentations, Iranian journalist Maziar Bahari, when talking about Iran, warned governments to not allow themselves to be bullied by the Iranian regime. In answer to another question, the Foreign Secretary said, "governments must embrace the legitimate aspirations of their people". With the unfolding of events in the Middle East, embodied in the people's 'Jasmine Revolution' and democracy being developed in Egypt, now is time for the British government to stand up for human rights, shine a light on repressive regimes and listen to what people living under such conditions are calling for.

Tibetans inside Tibet continue to resist occupation and show tremendous fortitude and courage in keeping their voice, culture, religion and language alive. The Tibetan people's demands for rights and freedoms will not go away; Tibet Society calls on the British government to not be bullied by China or seduced by trade, but to act on its principles and conscience and speak out for Tibetan people's right to universal values and a free and open civil society.

Earlier in March, 13 human rights organisations, including Tibet Society, submitted a statement on the current UK-China human rights dialogue to the Foreign Secretary. Tibet Society further calls on the Foreign Secretary to address this statement and take on board the constructive recommendations contained within it. For future stability within China and Tibet, there must be progress in human rights, confidence in the rule of law and a self determined civil society.

Further reading: [FCO annual report](#) | [William Hague's speech](#) | [NGO statement](#)

[Update: 5 May] The FCO have released their first quarterly update on human rights issues in China. The update mentions Chinese Vice-Premier Li Keqiang's visit to the UK in January and the UK-China human rights dialogue. The update confirms that during the dialogue the issue of Tibet was raised, along with a number of individual cases (which Tibet Society was told included the Panchen Lama and Dhondup Wangchen) plus issues such as freedom of expression and freedom of religion.

[Click here to read the FCO quarterly update.](#)

Key Points from FCO's 2010 Human Rights and Democracy Report:

Tibet (page 165)

Dialogue between representatives of the Dalai Lama and the Chinese government resumed in January but there were no substantive outcomes. China maintained that the sides disagree on the scope of the negotiations and the status of the negotiators. The Tibetan government in exile maintained that the Chinese have no real interest in engaging.

Restrictions on Tibetan Buddhism remained a particular area of concern. It is apparent that the Chinese government places restrictions on the number of monks and nuns permitted to join religious institutions and interferes with their practices through "patriotic education campaigns", which include forced denunciations of the Dalai Lama. Meanwhile, protests were sparked in October over the Qinghai provincial government's plans to make Mandarin Chinese the primary language of instruction in the province's Tibetan schools by 2015.

Our embassy officials visited Tibetan areas in Sichuan and Gansu in December. They found that, since 2008, basic stability had returned and the visible security presence was low. But sporadic protests continue to occur across the region. There was clear evidence on the ground of high levels of government development spending but local Tibetans reported obstacles to full participation in the economic opportunities flowing from this. Tibetans' dissatisfaction with their political and economic circumstances is entrenched. Many maintain that only government suppression is preventing a recurrence of the 2008 unrest.

We remain concerned over the rights and freedoms of the Tibetan people. We have urged China to renew its dialogue with the Dalai Lama's representatives as the best way to reach a solution.

From the China section (pages 158-168)

* There was no significant progress on civil and political rights in China in 2010 and in some areas there were negative developments, such as worsening treatment of activists and greater limitations on freedom of expression.

* The award of the Nobel Peace Prize on 10 December highlighted the plight of Liu Xiaobo, an activist whose calls for political reform and respect for human rights in China led to his imprisonment.

* Serious barriers to ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights remain in areas, including the right for individuals sentenced to death to seek pardon or commutation; forced labour; the right to liberty and security of person; the right to a fair trial; freedom of religion; freedom of expression; and freedom of association.

* We remain seriously concerned about access to justice in China, in particular about the lack of transparency and consistency in the application of the law.

* Torture and other ill treatment: Because the security of suspects in detention cannot be guaranteed, and because police investigators retain the power to remove detainees at will from detention centres, measures aimed at preventing torture will remain difficult to monitor or implement effectively.

* Death penalty: A revision to the Chinese criminal law in 2011 is expected to reduce the number of capital crimes from 68 to 55. [In 2010] China almost certainly continued to execute more people than the rest of the world put together. Estimates for the number of executions in the last year have ranged from 2,000 to 10,000. We were also concerned at the lack of transparency regarding the use of the death penalty by special tribunals set up in the aftermath of the 2008 Tibet protests and the 2009 Xinjiang riots.

* The use of a system of administrative detention called Re-education Through Labour has continued. Under this system police can unilaterally impose sentences of up to three years without any trial or independent oversight. Inmates include minor criminals, human rights defenders, political activists and Falun Gong practitioners.

* Throughout 2010 the Chinese authorities used house arrest or denial of basic freedoms to put pressure on human rights defenders and activists.

* Freedom of expression: Where the internet was used to call for political reform, "state subversion" laws were increasingly used to silence dissent. The Chinese government maintain that only a limited number of websites are blocked and that these are mainly pornographic, violent or 'separatist' in nature. Websites containing information on Tibetan independence, Falun Gong and "separatism" are regularly blocked. Twitter, Facebook and YouTube remained inaccessible across the mainland and thousands of blogs were censored or blocked.

* Freedom of religion: While some religions, such as the Russian Orthodox Church, are tolerated in addition to the five official ones, Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism, their status is less secure and can be subject to more arbitrary treatment by the state.

US delegation describes discontent and discrimination in Tibet

The United States Senate Foreign Relations Committee issued a report on 30 March on the findings of a delegation visit to Tibet in September 2010. The delegation found that Chinese economic and social policies, such as discrimination, Han migration and growing income equality, are "fueling discontent" among Tibetans in Tibet.

Read ICT's report

Tibet Society, the world's first Tibet support group, was founded in 1959. Funded by its members, it has been working for over 50 years to seek justice for Tibet through parliamentary lobbying, campaigns and actions. Help keep Tibet alive by joining Tibet Society today. (Annual membership £24; Family £36; Life £500).

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