

Report on the Dalai Lama's UK tour - June 2012

[29 June 2012] The Dalai Lama wrapped up a successful 10 day tour of the UK with a BBC interview, broadcast on 24 June, where he called on the Chinese government to hold an investigation into the causes of the self-immolations in Tibet. The UK visit included meetings with parliamentarians in London and Edinburgh and business leaders in Leeds, private meetings with Prince Charles and Aung San Suu Kyi as well as public talks and religious teachings.

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During an interview broadcast on The Andrew Marr Show on 24 June, the Dalai Lama said that as he had retired politically he would not comment on the "politically sensitive" self-immolations. However, he added, "Now Chinese leaders should carry thorough investigations [into] what causes these sad events."

The Dalai Lama also reiterated that it was possible he could be the last Dalai Lama. He said it was up to the Tibetan people to decide whether the institution continues or not. "If people feel it is not relevant then it will automatically cease."

Though the visit to the UK was to promote the Dalai Lama's vision of peace, compassion and harmony, political issues were never far away. The Chinese government pressured city councils to avoid meeting the Dalai Lama and questions were regularly asked by press and parliamentarians on the ongoing crisis in Tibet.

In an interview with Reuters on 20 June, the Dalai Lama said that talks with the Chinese government were "futile" unless Chinese leaders adopted a "realistic" stance. He said, "Unless they [Chinese leaders] start a realistic approach for the Tibetan problem inside Tibet, there's not much to discuss." He added that a shift towards democracy and better human rights in China were inevitable but instead of dealing with these actions the Chinese government find it "easier just to suppress".

Leeds

The Dalai Lama's first engagement in the UK was in Leeds on 15 June where he addressed hundreds of business leaders at the Yorkshire International Business Convention. During the talk, entitled "Ethics in Business", the Dalai Lama blamed the current financial crisis on "short-sightedness" and called for multinational companies to be "more transparent... in order to bring trust and respect."

China calls on UK cities to cancel Dalai Lama events

Prior to the Dalai Lama's appearance in Leeds it emerged that the Chinese government had put pressure on the Leeds City Council to cancel the meeting. The council were apparently told that failure to comply could result in Chinese athletes withdrawing from an Olympic training camp set to be held in Leeds. The council distanced itself from the event saying it was a privately funded event.

Fabian Hamilton, MP for Leeds North East and the chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Tibet expressed his outrage at China's interference in a BBC interview. Mr Hamilton said China were using "bully-boy tactics" and that it was

"reprehensible and disgraceful" that Chinese government officials were attempting to tell elected officials in Leeds who they should and should not be inviting to the city.

It later transpired that Chinese officials had pressured most, if not all, the city councils hosting the Dalai Lama. The Chinese Consul General to Scotland met with councils in Edinburgh, Dundee and Inverness and threatened to withdraw future investments if council leaders met with the Dalai Lama. The Lord Provost of Dundee, Bob Duncan, withdrew from giving a speech at an event with the Dalai Lama and the Dundee Council reportedly backed away from supporting the visit. It is not clear whether these actions were a result of Chinese government pressure.

The Dalai Lama dismissed China's attempts to disrupt the tour, saying such efforts were "almost routine" wherever he travelled and that he was only interested in spreading a message of peace and harmony.

Manchester

Following Leeds, the Dalai Lama headed to Manchester for three days of public talks and religious teachings. Nearly 25,000 people attended the events which included: "Stand Up and Be The Change", a special event for under 25s; "Real Change Happens in the Heart", a public talk; and, three sessions of Buddhist teachings.

The youth event was hosted by actor and comedian Russell Brand, who said he found the event "very inspiring and helpful". The Dalai Lama's message to young people was the urgent need to foster a culture of peace and dialogue in the 21st century. At the end of the event the Dalai Lama presented the first of a series of Youth Compassion Awards, given to a local youngster recognised for their altruistic acts of compassion. Similar awards were presented in London and Edinburgh.

A video campaign for "Stand Up and Be The Change" was also launched in Manchester and shown at subsequent public events. The campaign introduces the principles of non-violence, compassion and the resolution of disputes through dialogue.

London

On 19 June, a special audience was held in London for Tibet NGOs, to which staff and volunteers of Tibet Society were invited. The Dalai Lama's message was to continue to promote Tibet as a country "with a culture of peace and compassion". He also highlighted the importance of solving the environmental issues affecting the Tibetan plateau and said this was essential not only for the six million Tibetans living in Tibet but for the more than one billion people that depend on the Himalayas as its water resource.

A 6,000 sell-out crowd attended the "Real Change Happens in the Heart" public talk at the Royal Albert Hall (above, right), which included traditional Tibetan song and dance performances by the Tibetan Community in Britain.

Meeting of two icons of peace and freedom

The Dalai Lama and Burmese leader and fellow Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Aung San Suu Kyi, met for the first time in London on 19 June. Aung San Suu Kyi was in the UK to receive an honorary degree from Oxford University. Though the two met privately, it was later released that the Dalai Lama told her, "I have real admiration for your courage. I am very happy we've been able to meet." Aung San Suu Kyi told the Dalai Lama that his books had been a source of strength

during her years under house arrest in Burma.

Inter-faith service at Westminster Abbey

In the morning of 20 June, the Dalai Lama led an inter-faith prayer service at Westminster Abbey. The 30-minute service included an address by the Dalai Lama and readings and prayers from leaders of various faiths including: The Very Reverend Dr John Hall, Dean of Westminster; The Venerable Bogoda Seelawimala, Head Priest of the London Buddhist Vihara; The Lord Singh of Wimbledon, representative of the Sikh community; Rabbi Laura Janner-Klausner, representative of the Reformed Jewish Synagogues; Mr Anil Bhanot, representative of the Hindu community; and, Dr Natubhai Shah, representative of the Jain community.

During his address, the Dalai Lama called on religious leaders to put into practice what they preach. "We must work together to serve humanity," he said. "We now also have responsibility for the care of the planet."

Speaker's Lunch

The Speaker of the House of Commons, John Bercow, hosted a lunch for the Dalai Lama at the Speaker's House, located within the Palace of Westminster. The lunch was attended by key MPs and lords, including Ivan Lewis, the Shadow Secretary of State for International Development, Simon Hughes, the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrats, Fabian Hamilton, chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Tibet and MPs and lords from the APPG for Tibet. As Secretariat for the APPG for Tibet, Tibet Society representatives were also invited to attend this special event including Chair Riki Hyde Chambers, Council member Karma Chura-Tsang, Director Philippa Carrick and Campaigns Coordinator Paul Golding.

During the lunch the Dalai Lama thanked all those in attendance for their enduring support and help in spreading his message of non-violence and compassion. Despite the lunch over-running and his entourage keen to get to the next event, the Dalai Lama, in his inimitable style, said he would not be rushed and was determined to finish his dessert!

The Dalai Lama addresses MPs

On Wednesday 20 June the Dalai Lama gave an address to a meeting co-hosted by 27 All Party Parliamentary Groups, including the APPG for Tibet, in Committee Room 14 at the Houses of Parliament. The room was packed with well over 150 MPs and lords. The Dalai Lama gave a short address followed by a wide-ranging and lengthy Q&A session with questions raised covering topics from education to helping others and mindfulness.

When asked what parliamentarians could do to help achieve a free Tibet, the Dalai Lama said that though he had retired from politics, "I am Tibetan.. so I have a moral responsibility [to help Tibet]." He said there were many issues that needed attention, including religious freedom, equality, environment, language and culture. He added these issues not only affect six million Tibetans but over a billion people who follow Buddhism and even more people living in Asia who depend on Himalayan water and therefore are being, and will be, affected by environmental damage in Tibet. The Dalai Lama said there has to be a common sense approach to these issues to find realistic solutions.

Whilst at Westminster the Dalai Lama also had private meetings with Opposition Leader Ed Miliband (right) and Shadow Foreign Secretary Douglas Alexander. He also had a one-hour meeting with Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall on 20 June (below, right). After the meeting at Clarence House which included a tour of the gardens, the Dalai Lama described Prince Charles as the "best of friends".

During his stay in London, the Dalai Lama also presented a lecture at the London School of Economics entitled "Resisting Intolerance: An Ethical and Global Challenge", where he spoke out against censorship in China. He also had

audiences with Tibetans living in the UK and descendants of British people who were in Tibet in the 1950s.

The Dalai Lama meets members of the Gurkhas regiment

On 21 June the Dalai Lama travelled to Aldershot, known as the 'home of the British Army', to meet members of the Nepalese and Mongolian communities in the UK. At a public event, held at the Aldershot Town football ground in Surrey, the Dalai Lama also met past and present members of the Gurkha regiments before giving his talk "Importance of Buddhist Culture Preservation" to a crowd of over 5,000.

Edinburgh

On 22 June the Dalai Lama began the Scottish leg of his visit in Edinburgh. His first engagement was a joint audience with members of the Tibetan community in Scotland and members of the Scottish Parliament's Cross Party Group for Tibet at the Signet Library. Alison Johnstone, Green MSP and member of the Cross Party Group, said the Dalai Lama "talked about the need to act responsibly (and) understanding our actions' impact on others".

The Dalai Lama then addressed a sell-out audience at Usher Hall with a talk entitled "Beyond Religion: Ethics for the Whole World", which was also the keynote event of the 20th anniversary of the Edinburgh Lectures.

The Scottish Parliament was the venue for a luncheon hosted by the parliament's Presiding Officer, Tricia Marwick, which included meetings with Scottish parliamentarians and faith leaders. The Right Rev. Albert Bogle thanked the Dalai Lama for his visit and for showing that spiritual leaders can set an example by "letting the joy out" and bring smiles and laughter to their work.

Scottish leader criticised for snubbing the Dalai Lama

Scotland's First Minister, Alex Salmond, was accused of pandering to "Chinese government diktat" by failing to meet with the Dalai Lama. Opposition MSPs criticised the First Minister and pointed out that David Cameron had met with the Dalai Lama in May. Scottish Liberal Democrat leader Willie Rennie said Mr Salmond should "stand up for what's important" and promote human rights.

The Scottish government has previously been criticised for its relationship with China. In December Mr Salmond visited China to strengthen trade, arts and cultural links after the loan of two giant pandas to Edinburgh Zoo, but failed to raise the issues of human rights and Tibet. Mr Salmond has since said he would raise the issue of China's human rights record during his next trade mission to Beijing.

Final legs: Dundee and Inverness

In the afternoon of 22 June, the Dalai Lama delivered the Margaret Harris Lecture on Religion, "Education of the Mind", to a packed public audience at Caird Hall in Dundee. Despite the earlier controversy, the Lord Provost, Bob Duncan, received the Dalai Lama upon his arrival to Dundee.

On the final day of his visit, 23 June, the Dalai Lama gave a public talk in Inverness. Over 1,200 people filled Eden Court to hear the talk "Be the Change". As the Dalai Lama left the hall, to continue his European tour in Italy, the audience joined singers in a rousing rendition of Auld Lang Syne.

Further reading

Leeds

BBC (video): MP criticises China's 'bully-boy' tactics over Dalai Lama visit (13 June)

Independent: China threatens Leeds Olympic base pull-out (13 June)

Guardian: Dalai Lama visit: Leeds stands up to 'bully boy' China (14 June)

Yorkshire Post (video): Chinese Olympics threats brushed aside as Dalai Lama arrives in Leeds (15 June)

Manchester

Guardian: Dalai Lama dismisses Chinese protest over UK tour (15 June)

Manchester Evening News: Dalai Lama and Russell Brand enlighten and entertain audience at Manchester Arena (17 June)

London

Westminster Abbey: press release | order of service (PDF) | Dalai Lama's address (audio) (20 June)

Independent: 'Serve humanity', urges Dalai Lama (20 June)

Telegraph: Religious people must 'serve humanity' and save the planet (20 June)

Telegraph (video): Prince Charles goes hand-in-hand with the Dalai Lama (20 June)

BBC: Charles embraces Dalai Lama at informal talks (20 June)

Phayul: Meeting of global icons: The Dalai Lama meets Suu Kyi (20 June)

Aldershot

BBC (video): Dalai Lama visits Aldershot football ground (22 June)

BBC: Dalai Lama draws crowds in unlikely visit to Aldershot (21 June)

Scotland

BBC: Alex Salmond urged to meet Dalai Lama (17 June)

BBC (video): Dalai Lama's visit to Scotland sparks controversy (21 June)

Independent: Dalai Lama takes Salmond's 'snub' in his stride (23 June)

The Herald: Dalai Lama - Scots must choose their own future (23 June)

Highland News: Thousands welcome Dalai Lama to Inverness (23 June)

General

Independent: After 76 years (and 13 reincarnations) the Dalai Lama still draws a crowd ... (16 June)

Reuters: Dalai Lama - China unrealistic on Tibet, talks futile (20 June)

Reuters (video): Interview with Dalai Lama - 11 mins (20 June)

BBC (video): The Dalai Lama on The Andrew Marr Show - 6 mins (24 June)

Observer: You wait ages for a living Asian saint to arrive, then two come along at once - Comment by David Mitchell (24 June)

Reports from the official Dalai Lama website:

[18 June](#) | [19 June](#) | [20 June](#) | [21 June](#) | [22 June](#) | [23 June](#)

Tibet Society's photos on facebook:

[Manchester](#) | [London](#) | [Edinburgh](#)

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