

Lords debate highlights out of date government policy on Tibet

[27 February 2013] A debate in the House of Lords on 26 February has highlighted the British government's out of date policy on Tibet. Whilst reiterating its "deep concern" over the self-immolations in Tibet, the government called for the resumption of "substantive dialogues" between China and the Dalai Lama. However, the Dalai Lama relinquished his political role in 2011, passing on his duties to the Sikyong (Prime Minister of the Tibetan government in exile).

Tibet Society is calling on the British government to change its policy and urge China to enter into talks with representatives of the Tibetan people, such as the Tibetan government in exile.

The debate began with a question from Lord Alton of Liverpool, who asked the government "what discussions [they had] held with the Government of China about self-immolations in Tibet and China's approach to human rights in that region."

The Senior Minister of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Baroness Warsi, responded saying, "We are deeply concerned about the large number of self-immolations in Tibet. We regularly raise our concerns with the Chinese authorities."

Baroness Warsi, in a response to a later question, stated, "We continue to encourage all parties to work for a resumption of substantive dialogue as a means to address the Tibetan concerns and to relieve tensions. Of course, we continue to make the case to China that any economic progress can be sustained only if there is social progress as well."

In response to a further question by Lord Alton about a 2011 report on Tibet, Baroness Warsi stated, "We agree, at least in part, with some of [the report's] recommendations about the People's Republic of China and the Dalai Lama returning to dialogue to take these matters forward bilaterally."

The Archbishop of York then raised the point that the Dalai Lama is no longer a political leader, saying, "Will the Government nevertheless impress upon the Chinese Government that they should recognise and respect the Dalai Lama as a religious leader and not as a political leader?"

Baroness Warsi responded, "I cannot categorically say whether the specific issue of recognising the Dalai Lama as a spiritual leader has been raised."

The issue of the Panchen Lama was also raised, on which matter Baroness Warsi said that representations had been made to the Chinese government.

Tibet Society is calling on the British government to update its policy and the language of its statements to incorporate the Dalai Lama's transfer of political power to the Sikyong (Prime Minister of the Tibetan government in exile). The British government should be urging the Chinese government to open talks with "representatives of the Tibetan people", such as the Tibetan government in exile.

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Join the Tibet Lobby on Wednesday 13 March 2013 and call on the British government to take action to find a solution to

end the on-going crisis in Tibet. Join the lobby at Westminster or lobby your MP in your local constituency.

Sign up at www.tibetlobby.org/register and receive a free lobby pack which includes requests to make of your MP, a lobby card to give to your MP, lobbying tips and background information. You can also register by emailing paul@tibetsociety.com or calling Tibet Society on 020 7272 1414.

(The Tibet Lobby is organised by a coalition of UK-based Tibet groups including Tibet Society.)

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; Overseas £36; Life £500).

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