

2015-16 Tibet in Parliament (part 2)

Details and links of when and how Tibet and related matters have been raised in the UK Parliament during the 2015-16 parliamentary session. (Part 2: 1 January - 17 May 2016).

Part 2 (1 January - 17 May 2016)

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- 04/05/16: Commons written: FCO: Gedhun Choekyi Nyima (Panchen Lama)
- 04/05/16: Commons written: FCO: Asia: Climate Change (Tibet's environment)
- 28/04/16: Commons written: FCO: China: Human Rights (UK-China dialogues)
- 28/04/16: Commons written: FCO: China: Human Rights (Tibetan cases)
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- 25/02/16: Commons oral: Human Rights Obligations (China)
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Useful links

11 May 2016: House of Commons: Written Question: Department for International Development: Tibet: Overseas Aid

Tom Brake (Carshalton & Wallington) (Lib Dem): To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what steps her Department is taking to provide development assistance to native Tibetans in Tibet. (Asked on 4 May. Written question 36578)

Desmond Swayne (Minister of State, Department for International Development): DFID does not have a bilateral programme in the Tibetan region.

Tibet is included within an Asia Regional programme which helps communities adapt to the effects of climate change and environmental degradation in the Mount Kailash area, the source of South Asia's largest rivers. This area includes Tibet, India and Nepal. DFID has also funded assessments of glacial melt and rivers in the Himalayas, which contain findings relevant to Tibet.

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10 May 2016: House of Commons: Written Question: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Tibet: China

Tom Brake (Carshalton & Wallington) (Lib Dem): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, on what occasions ministers of his Department raised the issue of Tibet during visits to China since May 2015. (Asked on 4 May. Written question 36576)

Hugo Swire (Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs): In addition to our UK-China Human Rights Dialogues, we continue to make our views on Tibet known to the Chinese authorities through various channels. In June 2015 and November 2015 I set out to Parliament our concerns about rights and freedoms in the Tibetan Autonomous Region. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy also covers these issues.

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10 May 2016: House of Commons: Written Question: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Tibet: Sovereignty

Tom Brake (Carshalton & Wallington) (Lib Dem): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what benefits for Tibet have been achieved by the change of the Government's position on its status. (Asked on 4 May. Written question 36574)

Hugo Swire (Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs): On 29 October 2008, the then Foreign Secretary (David Miliband) clarified the Government's position on Tibet to the House, stating that: 'our interest is in long-term stability, which can only be achieved through respect for human rights and greater autonomy for the Tibetans'. That remains the view of this Government. For our assessment of the current human rights situation in China, including Tibet, I refer the Hon. Member to the 2015 Foreign and Commonwealth Office Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy, published on 21 April.

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10 May 2016: House of Commons: Written Question: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Tibet: Railways

Tom Brake (Carshalton & Wallington) (Lib Dem): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of the potential consequences for native Tibetans of the planned railway expansion from China into Tibet. (Asked on 4 May. Written question 36573)

Hugo Swire (Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs): The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has not made an assessment of the expansion of China's railway network in the Tibet Autonomous Region of China. We collect information about developments in Tibet from a wide range of reports, such as those made by the Chinese authorities and by Non-Governmental Organisations.

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10 May 2016: House of Commons: Written Question: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Tibet: Human Rights

Tom Brake (Carshalton & Wallington) (Lib Dem): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, with reference to Freedom in the World 2016, published by Freedom House in January 2016, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the finding that Tibet is the second least free country in the world. (Asked on 4 May. Written question 36572)

Hugo Swire (Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs): The Government regards the Tibet Autonomous Region as part of the People's Republic of China. We do have concerns about rights and freedoms in Tibet. We urge the Chinese authorities to respect freedom of religion, expression and association in Tibet in line with China's constitution and the international frameworks to which it is a party.

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09 May 2016: House of Commons: Written Question: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: China: Non-governmental Organisations

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what reports he has received on the potential effects of proposed legislation in China on the management of foreign non-governmental organisations' activities. (Asked on 3 May 2016. Written question 36260)

Hugo Swire (Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs): I follow the human rights situation in China closely and the wider impact of legislative developments. We will be gathering reactions, in particular from UK organisations and British nationals working in the Non-Governmental Organisation sector, to assess the law's potential impact ahead of it coming into force in January 2017. Along with EU partners we will be submitting detailed questions around the implementation of the law to the Chinese authorities.

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05 May 2016: House of Commons: Written Question: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Tibet: Religious Persons

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what his policy is on whether decisions on the reincarnation of Tibetan Lamas should be made by the Tibetan people. (Asked on 26 April. Written question 35532)

Hugo Swire (Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs): The Government does not have a policy on the reincarnation of Tibetan Lamas. We believe that everyone should be free to practise their religion according to their beliefs, and that all states should guarantee this freedom in line with international and domestic commitments.

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05 May 2016: House of Commons: Written Question: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Tibet: Ethnic Groups

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what estimate he has made of the proportion of (a) native Tibetans, (b) Han Chinese and (c) others who were resident in Tibet in (i) 2015, (ii) 2005 and (iii) 1995. (Asked on 26 April. Written question 35531)

Hugo Swire (Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs): The Government does not collect this data.

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04 May 2016: House of Commons: Written Question: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Tibet

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps he is taking with his EU counterparts to enable (a) EU diplomats and (b) journalists to enter Tibet. (Asked on 26 April. Written question 35591)

Hugo Swire (Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs): We support access to the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) for EU diplomats and a number have recently been granted access. The Ambassador of Denmark was the most recent high-level visitor in April and other senior EU diplomats, including from the UK, are planning a joint visit in 2016. For its part, the UK has a standing request to visit but, as we note in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy, China did not accept our requests in 2015. We also support access to the TAR for journalists. The Foreign Correspondents Club of China reports that approximately three-quarters of journalists had their application to visit Tibet denied in 2015. We consistently raise the issue of access to the TAR and media freedom in the annual UK-China human rights dialogue.

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04 May 2016: House of Commons: Written Question: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Tibet: Visits Abroad

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, when (a) a minister and (b) officials in his Department last visited the area described by the Chinese government as the Tibetan Autonomous Region. (Asked on 26 April. Written question 35590)

Hugo Swire (Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs): The Hon. Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis) was the last serving Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) minister to visit the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), in September 2009. An FCO official last visited the TAR in June 2014. We continue to press the Chinese authorities for further access.

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04 May 2016: House of Commons: Written Question: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Gedhun Choekyi Nyima

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, when he last made representations to the Chinese government on the fate of the Panchen Lama; and what response he received to such representations. (Asked on 26 April. Written question 35550)

Hugo Swire (Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs): As I said in my answer to PQ12772 on 29 October last year, we urge China to ensure that the restrictions on the Panchen Lama's freedom of movement and communication are lifted, so that he may select the career, education or religious life of his choosing, wherever he is. We most recently raised the matter at the UK-China Human Rights Dialogue in 2014. We had no substantive response but the Chinese authorities stated in September 2015 that the Panchen Lama was "leading a normal life". We will raise the matter again at the next round of the Human Rights Dialogue later this year.

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04 May 2016: House of Commons: Written Question: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Asia: Climate Change

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change on the climate threat arising from Chinese activities affecting the third pole region. (Asked on 26 April. Written question 35542)

James Duddridge (Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Foreign and Commonwealth Office): Ministers in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department of Energy and Climate Change have not discussed this issue. However, the Tibet Society has been in contact with China Department about a report they produced on the Tibetan Plateau.

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28 April 2016: House of Commons: Written Question: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: China: Human Rights

Tim Loughton (East Worthing & Shoreham) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what the response of the government of China was to representations the Government made to it during the UK-China Human Rights Dialogues held in Beijing in April 2015 and in London in 2014 on human rights violations against Tibetans. (Asked on 25 April. Written question 35337)

Hugo Swire (Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs): I should like to refer my Hon. Friend the Member of East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) to my response to PQ35360.

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28 April 2016: House of Commons: Written Question: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: China: Human Rights

Tim Loughton (East Worthing & Shoreham) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 11 April 2016 to Question 32522, who the 22 Tibetans referred to in that Answer are; and what the response was of the Chinese authorities in the case of each such Tibetan. (Asked on 25 April. Written question 35360)

Hugo Swire (Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs): We included the cases of nine Tibetans detained by the Chinese authorities on a list of cases submitted to the Chinese delegation ahead of the 2015 UK-China Human Rights Dialogue. These included Tenzin Delek Rinpoche and Dhondup Wangchen. In 2014, we included the names of 16 Tibetan individuals on our case list. Three cases, including Tenzin Delek Rinpoche, appeared on both case lists. The UK-China Human Rights Dialogue is a platform for detailed, expert exchanges on human rights issues. We do not make our full case lists public as in some cases the individuals concerned do not want us to. We do not publish Chinese responses to cases raised as we assess this will be counter-productive. We continue to make our concerns about the human rights situation in China, including Tibet, known publicly via other means, such as in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy.

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25 April 2016: House of Commons Motion: Nepal Earthquake: First Anniversary

During the debate reference was made to the Tibetan community in Nepal

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy & Cowdenbeath, SNP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for securing this fine debate. Two of my constituents, Thomas and Elke Weston, have very strong links with the Tibetan Buddhist community in Nepal, and over the past year they have taught me a great deal about the work that local charities are doing. They have not been slow to put in the effort and put in their money. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that at this time, not least given the imminent monsoon period, we need to encourage all local charities, as well as Governments, to assist?

Mr Gareth Thomas (Harrow West, Lab/Co-op): I join the hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to the many charities, small and large, that have assisted. I want to draw particular attention to the contribution that many from Britain made to the search and rescue effort once reports of the earthquake had become clear, and to pay tribute to the work of NGOs such as the excellent Oxfam, Save the Children, VSO and Christian Aid, which have responded. CAFOD is another strong example of an international NGO operating in Nepal.

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11 April 2016: House of Commons: Written Question: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: China: Human Rights

Tim Loughton (East Worthing & Shoreham) (Con): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, which cases of human rights violations against Tibetans he or ministerial colleagues have taken up with their Chinese counterparts in each of the last three years. (Asked on 24 March. Written question 32522)

Hugo Swire (Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs): Over the course of the UK-China Human Rights Dialogues held in Beijing in April 2015 and in London in 2014, senior officials raised the cases of 22 Tibetans detained by the Chinese authorities. We also raised the full range of our wider human rights concerns on Tibet at each of these rounds, including allegations of torture, freedom of expression, right to a fair trial and freedom of religion or belief. A round of the Human Rights Dialogue was not held in 2013.

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17 March 2016: House of Commons: Written Question: Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Tibet: Religious Freedom

Catherine West (Hornsey & Wood Green, Lab): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps he is taking to support religious freedom in Tibet.

Hugo Swire (Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs): I refer the Honourable Member to the answer I gave on 29 October 2015 to question 12786.

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2 March 2016: House of Commons: Prime Minister Questions: Engagements

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): Yesterday the chair of the board of the International Campaign for Tibet, Mr Richard Gere, came to the House of Commons to meet Members of Parliament as well as you, Mr Speaker. Will the Prime Minister follow the example set by the United States, Canada, Germany and Japan and write to the Chinese authorities to express his concerns about the oppressive counter-terrorism laws introduced in Tibet?

The Prime Minister: I was not aware of the visit by Richard Gere. I will look closely at what he said and perhaps get back to the right hon. Lady about the issues he raises.

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1 March 2016: Early Day Motion 1171: Human Rights in Tibet and China

Tabled by Tom Brake (Carshalton & Wallington) (Lib Dem): This House notes with grave concern that Tibet has been ranked the 208th worst place out of 209 for freedom and human rights in 2015 in a report by the US-based pressure group Freedom House, behind countries with notoriously poor human rights records, such as North Korea, Somalia and Saudi Arabia, and ahead only of Syria; further notes that the report strongly criticises the Chinese state's use of torture, noting it is widespread in practice and is used for the purpose of extracting confessions or forcing political and religious dissidents to recant their beliefs, and reports that conditions in detention are harsh and that the estimated three to five million detainees are subject to regular beatings, inadequate food and the deprivation of medical care; calls on the Government to use its bilateral connections with China and its leverage in international forums to highlight this appalling situation; and regrets that the Government's desire to improve trade and economic links with China has of late resulted in a much more muted response to human rights abuses in China.

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25 February 2016: House of Lords: Oral Question: Public Bodies: Israel Boycotts

During the debate a reference was made to Tibet:

Lord Palmer of Childs Hill (Lib Dem): In the light of local government guidance, could the Minister say what action the boycott movement has taken with regard to the Russian invasion of Crimea - I apologise for asking this of a Cabinet Office Minister - the Chinese occupation of Tibet, Turkey's occupation of Northern Cyprus and the Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara?

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, Lord Bridges of Headley (Con): The noble Lord raises lots of issues, but this is about boycotts being conducted by local authorities, which I would argue are counterproductive. They widen gaps in understanding, poison and polarise debate, and block opportunities for co-operation and collaboration.

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25 February 2016: House of Commons: Oral Questions to Attorney General: Human Rights Obligations

Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): Yesterday, Amnesty International published its annual report, which rightly criticises the Government's plan to scrap Labour's excellent Human Rights Act. Amnesty's UK director, Kate Allen, commented that the behaviour of the UK towards China, Saudi Arabia and Egypt shows that the Government have lost their passion to promote human rights. Does not the Government kow-towing to countries like China and Saudi Arabia, without challenging their dodgy human rights records, and the Prime Minister's phoney plan to water down the Human Rights Act, send the wrong message to dictators and rogue states?

The Attorney General (Jeremy Wright): No. The position is this: Government Members, I am sure in common with the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues, will continue passionately to advocate the case for the protection of human rights both in this country and abroad. He is quite wrong to say that this Government, in common with their predecessors, do not challenge other states that have a doubtful human rights record—we continue to do that.

In relation to the Amnesty International report, I have a huge amount of respect for what Amnesty International does, but in this report it has, in my view, overstated its case just a little. It is not the case, as I have said before and as the hon. Gentleman knows, that human rights and the Human Rights Act are the same thing. It is possible to protect human rights without the Human Rights Act—in fact better to do so—and that is what this Government intend to do.

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11 February 2016: House of Commons: Backbench business: Persecution of Religious Minorities: Pakistan

During the debate a reference to Tibet was made:

Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab): ... My hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) and I have worked closely on many issues to do with the persecution of minorities—not only religious ones. Indeed, we have travelled to India together to see the plight of the Tibetan Buddhist community there...

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