

Conservative Party Human Rights Commission: Human Rights in China

The Darkest Moment: The Crackdown on Human Rights in China, 2013-16. A report by the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission, published on 28 June 2016.

The purpose of the report was to examine China's human rights record under the leadership of President Xi Jinping. The Commission's brief included assessing "the wider implications for freedom of religion or belief; [and] the ongoing repression in Tibet", as well as analysing UK foreign policy towards China and Hong Kong and proposing recommendations for the UK government.

The 68-page report can be downloaded as

a PDF document via

www.conservativehumanrights.com.

Key Extracts from Report

[Introduction](#) | [Executive Summary](#) | [Recommendations](#) | [Tibet](#)

[UK Foreign Policy](#) | [Conclusions](#)

Introduction (pg 9)

...Under Xi Jinping's leadership, human rights in China appear to have deteriorated severely. According to Yang Jianli, founder of Initiatives for China, in evidence to our inquiry, "this is the darkest moment for Chinese human rights in years"...

An unprecedented crackdown on civil society, human rights defenders, freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief, to name just some thematic issues, is unfolding...

Executive Summary (pg 13)

...Without exception, every single oral and written submission to the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission's inquiry on human rights in China 2013-2016 detailed a severe deterioration in human rights in China during this period and concluded that the situation was the worst it has been in many years...

Some say it is the worst time for human rights in China since the Tiananmen massacre of pro-democracy demonstrators in 1989. The vast majority of submissions use the phrase "unprecedented" to describe the situation...

According to most sources, torture continues to be widely used...

China continues to execute more people than any other country in the world...

Freedom of expression, particularly through the media and social media, is severely repressed...

The situation in Tibet continues to be severely restricted. Freedom House ranks Tibet as among the very worst in the world for freedom and human rights. There are believed to be over 640 known political prisoners in Tibet, according to the Tibet Society in their submission, although some other sources put the figure as high as 2,081. The death in prison in July 2015 of Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche, a Tibetan religious and community leader serving a life sentence, and the continuing self-immolations by Tibetans illustrate the alarming absence of human rights protection...

In conducting this inquiry, the Commission reviewed Foreign and Commonwealth Office statements and reports on China. We were deeply concerned by how understated they are...

We therefore urge the United Kingdom Government to conduct a thorough review of its China policy; to study seriously our recommendations; to ensure the promotion and protection of human rights, the rule of law, and democratic values are at the centre of our relationship with China; to explore what steps can be taken to recalibrate this relationship; and to engage actively with human rights Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Chinese activists in exile, and, where possible, dissidents and civil society within China, as well as academics and other experts...

In 1949, Chairman Mao declared that the Chinese people had stood up. Now it is time for the United Kingdom and others in the international community to stand up for the Chinese people...

Recommendations (in full, pg 18)

The Conservative Party Human Rights Commission makes the following recommendations to Her Majesty's Government:

1. To speak publicly, as well as privately, to China about its deteriorating human rights situation;
2. To conduct a thorough, comprehensive, open and radical review of British foreign policy towards China, to inform and recalibrate the United Kingdom's relationship with China; and for such a review to involve consultation with human rights Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), human rights lawyers, activists, religious communities and NGOs in China where possible, exiled Chinese dissidents, journalists, academics and other experts;
3. To raise specific cases, publicly and privately, such as the cases of jailed Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Liu Xiaobo, disabled human rights lawyer Ni Yulan under house arrest, and jailed Uyghur intellectual Ilham Tohti, among others;
4. To engage with greater consultation, transparency and accountability around the UK-China Human Rights Dialogue, and to include civil society and UK-based and international human rights NGOs; we would like to think they have already been involved in such exchanges, and encourage this on an ongoing basis;
5. To establish specific benchmarks for progress in the UK-China Human Rights Dialogue, and the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue;
6. To report publicly on the outcomes of discussions with China on human rights;

7. To commit to meeting regularly with prominent human rights activists, including the Dalai Lama, from mainland China, Tibet, Xinjiang and Hong Kong;
8. To invest funding in desperately needed initiatives for medical and psychological services for rehabilitation of torture survivors and their family members;
9. To intensify and increase efforts on behalf of British citizens detained in China. The cases of Lee Po from Hong Kong; Akmal Shaikh, executed in Xinjiang in 2009; Neil Heywood, murdered in Chongqing in November 2011; and Peter Humphreys, arrested in August 2013 should prompt a review of the deaths, detentions and executions of UK citizens in China, especially if we are to have a “golden era” of relations;
10. To urgently review mechanisms for monitoring the obligations under the Sino-British Joint Declaration for Hong Kong, and to convene internal discussions to devise redress mechanisms that can be proposed to the authorities in mainland China and Hong Kong, unequivocally supporting the basic rights of the people of Hong Kong;
11. To utilise the UN Human Rights Council mechanisms and the Universal Periodic Review of China’s human rights record, coming up in 2018, to press for real progress in China;
12. To urge China to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR);
13. To urge China to extend an invitation to the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief to visit the country, and to be permitted unrestricted access to all parts of the country, including Tibet and Xinjiang;
14. To urge China to engage in a substantive and meaningful dialogue with the Dalai Lama or his representatives and to work towards a peaceful and mutually acceptable resolution for Tibet;
15. To increase funding for independent civil society and lawyers in China, as long as care is taken a) not to provide funding only to government-associated Non-Governmental Organisations; and b) within the parameters of the new laws, to avoid any steps which might jeopardise Chinese domestic civil society organisations through association with foreign funding;
16. To encourage, organise and support civil society exchanges between China and the United Kingdom, including by lawyers, human rights organisations, independent bloggers and other civil society groups;
17. To continue and increase funding for specialised training programmes to strengthen capacity, knowledge and skills in international law, human rights, rule of law and other related areas, especially for professionals such as lawyers, judges and academics;
18. To consider supporting specific measures to target sanctions against individual senior Chinese officials implicated in human rights violations such as torture, including the enforcement of travel bans and asset freezes;

19. To review the conduct of Confucius Institutes, cultural exchanges utilised for propaganda purposes in the United Kingdom, and Chinese funding of other educational institutions and initiatives overseas;

20. To commission an international, independent review of the issue of organ harvesting in China, to establish the truth about where organs are sourced from;

21. To initiate legislation to prohibit organ tourism to China, at least until a comprehensive investigation has been completed, to review hospital confidentiality on organ tourism, and to consider releasing the statistics on the number of British citizens who travel to China for organ transplants each year;

22. To work with the European Union and others to prepare a list of doctors engaged in organ harvesting in China, and to introduce a travel ban for those associated with such practices.

Section 7: Tibet (in full, pg 43)

“Every aspect of Tibetan life is under siege and Tibetans have even fewer civil and political rights than Chinese people also ruled by the Communist Party,” says Yeshe Choesang of Tibet Post International in his submission to us. “The regime enforces its control over every aspect through the threat and use of arbitrary punishments, at times including severe violence.”

Since the Chinese invasion in 1949, an estimated 1.2 million Tibetans have been raped, tortured and murdered, thousands imprisoned and over 6,000 Tibetan Buddhist monasteries destroyed, according to Yeshe Choesang.

Illustrative of the sheer desperation felt by many Tibetans, recent years have seen a significant number of monks self-immolating. On 29 February 2016 Kalsang Wangdu, an 18 year-old monk, self-immolated, bringing the total verified number of self-immolations in Tibet to 143 since February 2009. Of these, 123 died while the others were either critically injured or their whereabouts and status are unknown.

According to Yeshe Choesang, “the main causes of the Tibetan people’s grievances are China’s policies of political repression, cultural assimilation, economic marginalisation, social discrimination and environmental destruction in Tibet.”

The US Congressional Executive Committee on China records 646 political prisoners in Tibet, although the Tibetan Human Rights Group, as cited by Yeshe Choesang, claims that there are a total of 2081 Tibetan political prisoners, including 967 monks. Of these, 68 were detained in 2015, according to Yeshe Choesang’s submission. They are frequently subjected to extreme forms of torture and denial of medical care. In 2014, an increasing number of Tibetans died in detention as a result of their treatment. Tenzin Choedak had every bone in his feet broken and his jaw dislocated before he was returned to his family on ‘medical parole’. He died two days later, on 5 December 2014. On 12 July 2015, Tenzin Delek Rinpoche, a highly respected Tibetan Buddhist leader, died in prison. On 13 July 2015, Chinese police fired upon Tibetans protesting his death.

According to the Tibet Society, “Tibetans charged with political crimes are often tried in secret, not allowed independent legal representation and evidence against them is extracted by torture”.

On 10 April 2013, eight Tibetan students were jailed for their involvement in mass protests against education policies which included the restriction of the use of the Tibetan language. On 27 January 2016, Tashi Wangchuk, an advocate of Tibetan language education, was detained and charged with “inciting separatism”.

The possession and display of the Tibetan national flag and images of the Dalai Lama are banned. On 7 November 2014, two young monks were jailed after peaceful protests earlier in the year which had involved waving hand-drawn versions of the Tibetan flag. On 17 February 2016, Gomar Choephel, a 47 year-old monk, was sentenced to two years for sharing a photo of the Dalai Lama on social media. In the same month, two senior monks, Khenpo Pagah and Geshe Orgyen, were detained following a large prayer ceremony at their monastery held for the good health of the Dalai Lama.

According to Free Tibet in their submission, “a number of political prisoners escaped from Tibet between 2013 and 2016 and provided testimonies about their treatment in prison in the years immediately before 2013, including beatings by police and other security services during interrogation sessions, mock executions, receiving electric shocks during interrogations and being locked in cells that were pitch black or so small that they could not move around. There are also several clear indications that these practices continue. For example, several former political prisoners reported being shackled to a device known as an iron chair, which forces the detainee to bear their entire weight on their wrists and legs. They would be hung from this chair for periods of up to four or five hours at a time, sometimes accompanied by electric shocks and intervals when they are removed from the chair and beaten.”

Freedom of religion or belief is severely violated in Tibet. According to Free Tibet, China has “restricted religious freedom through tight controls on monasteries”. According to Christian Solidarity Worldwide’s submission, in March 2016 the authorities imposed new restrictions on Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in Rebgong (Tongren) county in Qinghai province. In September 2014, according to Free Tibet, 26 nuns were expelled from their nunnery after they refused to criticise the Dalai Lama. In September 2015, authorities expelled a further 106 nuns from the nunnery, making many of them homeless, and then demolished the nuns’ living quarters under the pretext of carrying out renovations.

The Panchen Lama, Gedhun Choeki Nyima, remains missing following his abduction in 1995 when he was just six years old. China refuses to provide any evidence of his whereabouts or well-being.

It is important to note Free Tibet’s observation that the reduction in the number of the most egregious abuses in Tibet over the past three years, such as the comparatively less frequent instances of lethal force being employed to control protests, should not be regarded as any sign of improvement. “This does not indicate a softening of China’s approach in Tibet, or greater acceptance of Chinese rule by Tibetans,” argue Free Tibet. “Instead, it reflects China’s current effectiveness in implementing policies that have so restricted Tibetans’ ability to express opposition to its rule in both private and public spheres that the need to systematically employ violence arises more rarely.”

Section 11. UK Foreign Policy towards China and Hong Kong (pg 58)

...We are... concerned that UK policy on China appears to have shifted considerably since 2013; that the UK appears reluctant to raise human rights in China publicly... and that economic interests appear to be overriding other important concerns in our relationship with China...

The FCO’s Annual Report could be strengthened both in language used and in specific detail of issues and cases. The section on China in the 2015 Annual Report on human rights appears to be remarkably understated given the scale of the human rights situation, and comes to little more than half a page. In contrast, the United States State Department annual human rights report devotes 141 pages to China. Whilst we welcome the FCO’s commitment in their report to “continue to raise human rights issues through whichever channel is most effective,” this Commission notes with regret the absence of appropriate public challenge by the UK Government on the concerning deterioration of human rights in China during the years covered by this report. Such absence appears to detract from this commitment...

The Conservative Party Human Rights Commission is deeply concerned by the apparent tendency among many in the international community to allow China to intimidate them into silence about human rights violations in China...

We would welcome hearing from the Foreign Secretary with examples of where (private advocacy) has been successful in recent years in the case of China, and what “tangible results” the current UK approach is yielding. We urge greater transparency in this regard, and that the FCO meet regularly with human rights NGOs for a two-way exchange of information and ideas and for feedback on discussions that have been held on human rights with the Chinese Government. Further specific recommendations are detailed earlier in the report, and we urge the United Kingdom to review its approach on such issues thoroughly...

Conclusions (pg 67)

In the relationship between the United Kingdom and China, we must make it clear that we are on the side of the people of China – especially in what is described by Yang Jianli, founder of Initiatives for China, in his evidence to this inquiry, as “the darkest moment” for human rights in China in years...

[end]

Further reading:

[The Commission’s report \(PDF, 68 pages\)](#)

[Tibet Society’s submission \(PDF, 12 pages\)](#)

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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