

Tibet Society briefs Foreign Office prior to UK-China Human Rights Dialogue

[18 November 2016] Prior to the UK-China Human Rights Dialogue held at the end of October, Tibet Society submitted a report on Tibetan political prisoners to the Foreign Office and briefed the new Minister for Asia and the Pacific on human rights issues in Tibet. It is understood many of these issues were raised during the dialogue, though disappointingly no official statement has been made to confirm this.

Briefing at the Foreign Office

Tibet Society was one of a number of human rights NGOs invited to brief new minister Alok Sharma in mid-October prior to the UK-China Human Rights Dialogue. Alok Sharma is the Minister responsible for Asia and the Pacific and led the UK delegation at the Dialogue. Mr Sharma replaced Hugo Swire in the reshuffle following David Cameron's resignation in July.

At the briefing with Mr Sharma and senior Foreign Office civil servants, Tibet Society and other Tibet group representatives raised a number of issues of concern: religious repression including the current crisis at Larung Gar; political prisoner cases including Tashi Wangchuk and Shokjang; the 20-year disappearance of Tibet's Panchen Lama, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima; and, the UK government's policy on Tibet and the use of language such as "not supporting Tibetan independence".

(Pictured above: Outside the Foreign Office - Paul Golding, Tibet Society; Kunsang Dolma, Tibetan Community UK, Eleanor Byrne-Rosengren, Free Tibet; and, Ellen Lees, Students for a Free Tibet UK)

Thanks to Tibet supporters writing to their MPs and the Foreign Office, the minister and civil servants were already well aware of the Larung Gar issue and many of the political prisoner cases and stated they were planning to raise the issues with their Chinese counterparts during the Dialogue.

At the end of the briefing Tibet Society presented the Foreign Office with a copy of its report "Imprisoned in Tibet". The report details the cases of four Tibetans who have died in custody since the last UK-China Human Rights Dialogue (held in April 2015). The report also highlights the cases of 12 Tibetan political prisoners who have been sentenced since April 2015 and the case of Tashi Wangchuk who is currently awaiting trial.

Download the report: Imprisoned in Tibet

(PDF document, 12 pages)

UK-China Human Rights Dialogue

The 23rd UK-China Human Rights Dialogue took place in London on 27-28 October 2016. The UK delegation was led by Foreign Office Minister Alok Sharma, with Special Representative for Human Rights Affairs of the Foreign Ministry Liu Hua heading the Chinese delegation.

Unfortunately, to date, little information has been forthcoming about the proceedings and China's responses to the cases

and issues raised by the UK.

Following the Dialogue, Alok Sharma issued a statement saying, "Senior officials discussed the full range of matters relating to human rights, including on freedom of expression and religion." He added, "The dialogue was held in a constructive and open manner." The statement made no reference to Tibet or any of the outcomes of the dialogue.

However, Tibet Society has since been informed by Foreign Office sources that the UK delegation raised the following issues: Larung Gar; the Panchen Lama plus a number of other Tibetan political prisoners; and, diplomatic access to Tibet (there has been no UK diplomatic visit to Tibet since 2009).

Tibet Society continues to call on the UK government to publicise its key concerns raised in the Dialogue, to make the Dialogue more open and transparent, including the involvement of civil society and to initiate a process involving benchmarks to ascertain whether progress is being made on human rights in Tibet and China.

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