

Letter to Prime Minister on Human Rights Day

[10 December 2016] On the occasion of Human Rights Day 2016, Tibetan Uyghur & Chinese Solidarity UK (of which Tibet Society is a founding member) delivered a letter to Prime Minister Theresa May.

Prime Minister Theresa May

10 Downing Street

London SW1A 2AA

10 December 2016

Dear Prime Minister May,

On the occasion of Human Rights Day 2016, we, the undersigned representatives of Tibetan Uyghur & Chinese Solidarity UK [1], respectfully ask you to uphold the UK's human rights obligations by taking action to address the gross human rights violations taking place in China, Tibet and East Turkestan (Xinjiang). We urge you to call on the Chinese government to stop torture, release all political prisoners and respect the human rights of all its citizens.

This year has seen the Chinese government continue its crackdown against civil society, with increased restrictions on freedom of expression, freedom of movement and freedom of religion. These measures are an attempt to silence criticism of the Chinese Communist Party, to maintain control over the population and to present an appearance of "stability and harmony" to the outside world. The crackdown is especially harsh on ethnic minorities, such that only Syria is ranked worse in the world for the lack of freedoms. [2]

Torture remains endemic in China. Last year, the UN Committee against Torture expressed serious concerns over China's continued use of torture to extract confessions. Despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, China denied the existence of torture in its detention centres and prisons. During the UN review process, Chinese officials even made the outrageous claim that "there are no political prisoners in China".

It is vital that the UK, and other like-minded countries, speak out publicly to expose human rights abuses in China and work together to press China for real change.

This Human Rights Day, we are highlighting the cases of three political prisoners, all of whom are at risk of torture from the Chinese authorities.

- Zhang Haitao, a Chinese blogger and activist, was sentenced on 15 January 2016 to 19 years in prison for "inciting subversion of state power". Zhang was arrested after publicly criticising China's repressive policies toward Uyghurs and Tibetans. He has been repeatedly tortured and denied access to medical treatment in prison.

- Ilham Tohti, a Uyghur academic, was sentenced to life imprisonment on 23 September 2014 on separatism-related charges. He is an advocate of autonomy for Uyghurs and worked to promote understanding between Uyghurs and Han Chinese. In October 2016, he was awarded the Martin Ennals prize for human rights defenders.

- Tashi Wangchuk, a Tibetan businessman, is currently in detention awaiting trial. He was arrested on 26 January 2016 after the New York Times publicised his efforts to promote Tibetan culture and language, which included a proposed lawsuit against local authorities for the lack of Tibetan language education.

On 28 October 2016, on the re-election of the UK to the UN Human Rights Council, Foreign Office Minister Baroness Anelay reiterated the UK government's policy "to hold to account nations that commit serious and systematic violations against their citizens."

In light of the UK's policy to promote and protect human rights, and China's human rights record, we urge the UK government to:

- Make a robust public statement condemning China's human rights abuses and specifically call for the immediate and unconditional release of Chinese blogger and activist Zhang Haitao, Uyghur intellectual Ilham Tohti, and Tibetan language advocate Tashi Wangchuk.
- Urge China to immediately ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and uphold human rights obligations as defined under international treaties and in its own constitution, including: upholding the rule of law, allowing freedom of expression, religion and movement, ending the systematic use of torture and releasing all political prisoners.
- Work multilaterally with other countries to hold China to account over its human rights abuses and press for adherence to universally-accepted human and civil rights.
- Utilise all available international mechanisms, such as the Universal Periodic Review of China's human rights record and other devices available via the United Nations, to encourage the Chinese government into substantial progress on human rights.
- Set benchmarks for the UK-China Human Rights Dialogues, in order to ensure progress is made and to assess the effectiveness of the dialogues.
- Raise human rights with China at every opportunity and at all government and ministerial levels, and to be open and transparent in all its dealings with China.

We look forward to your considered response.

Yours sincerely,

Phuntsok Dhondup, Shao Jiang & Rahime Mahmut

(on behalf of Tibetan Uyghur Chinese Solidarity UK)

Notes:

1. Tibetan Uyghur & Chinese Solidarity UK opposes the tyrannical rule of the Chinese Communist Party and upholds the values of freedom, human rights and democracy. Tibetan Uyghur & Chinese Solidarity UK is made up of the following organisations: Chinese Solidarity Campaign, Federation for Democratic China, Free Tibet, Friends of Tiananmen Mothers, Students for a Free Tibet UK, Tibetan Community in Britain, Tibet Society, Uyghur Association and Uyghur Community UK.

2. In January 2016, US-based NGO Freedom House ranked Tibet as the second worst region in the world for lack of freedoms. Only Syria was rated worse. [https://freedomhouse.org/report/](https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2016)

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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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