



STAND UP FOR TIBET

Tibet Lobby 2019

Background to Ask 1: Urge China to provide unhindered and immediate access to Tibet

Call on the UK government to urge China to grant independent observers, including the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, immediate and unhindered access to Tibet to assess the human rights situation on the ground.

Background – Access to Tibet

The Chinese authorities routinely restrict access to Tibet. This means that government officials, journalists and human rights monitors are prevented from entering the country. In the last 20 years, China has allowed only two UN High Commissioners for Human Rights to visit the country in order to assess the human rights situation: Mary Robinson in 1998 and Louise Arbour in 2005. Similarly, the UK government's requests to visit the country have fallen on deaf ears. Although a UK diplomat was granted access to Tibet in June 2014 on an escorted visit and the British Ambassador visited Tibet from 26-30 June 2017 with other EU Heads of Mission, requests made specifically by the UK government to visit Tibet have remained outstanding since 2014.

The lack of access provided to human rights monitors to investigate the human rights situation in the country has serious repercussions for those living under Chinese rule. Human rights violations in Tibet and the surrounding Tibetan provinces are widespread. The Chinese authorities continue to arbitrarily detain and torture Tibetans, to subject them to religious repression, deny them their cultural identity and to impose harsh penalties on Tibetans for disseminating dissenting views and sharing politically sensitive content. Tibetans are banned from flying their national flag and celebrating their spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, and even face jail terms for advocating for the use of Tibetan language in schools. For the third consecutive year, Tibet has ranked as the second worst place in the world for civil and political rights, following only Syria.

Granting access to Tibet would enable human rights actors and governments to provide an independent and fact-based analysis of the situation. Without this, Tibetans will continue to have their rights denied and the many violations will go unreported.

The UK government must press the Chinese authorities to respect their international commitments and grant independent observers access to Tibet.

Outstanding visit requests by UN human rights experts and working groups:

The United Nations has a number of different functions, one of which is the protection and promotion of human rights. China has consistently pledged to cooperate with the United Nations Human Rights Council and other human rights experts. Despite promises made by the Chinese government to grant UN experts access to the territory into investigate human rights violations and abuses, visit requests go largely unanswered or are drawn out for years. There are currently at least 17 outstanding visit requests by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), some of which are documented below:

- **13 January 2003:** The UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion accepted an invitation for a country visit. A reminder was sent on 26 September 2006. Fifteen years on, this visit remains outstanding.
- **2005:** The UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders issued a request for a visit. Reminders were sent in 2008 and most recently on 3 February 2015.
- **24 March 2005:** The UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions requested a visit. Two reminders were sent on 24 December 2008 and 27 July 2009 respectively.
- **30 July 2009:** the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues submitted a request. A reminder was sent on 1 November 2010 and again on 27 July 2015.
- **1 June 2011:** The UN Special Rapporteur on independence of judges and lawyers requested a visit. Reminders were sent on 31 May 2013, 27 March 2014 and 18 November 2015.
- **23 September 2011:** The UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of peaceful assembly and of association issued a visit request. Reminders were sent to the Chinese authorities on 15 November 2013 and 18 September 2017 respectively.
- **19 February 2013:** the UN Working Group on enforced disappearances submitted a visit request. Since then, the group has issued two written reminders, on 2 September 2013 and on 27 October 2014 respectively.
- **10 April 2015:** The UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression submitted a visit request to assess the concerns raised regarding the right to freedom of expression for those under Chinese rule. Three years on, the Chinese authorities have failed to provide a response to this request. Last year, on 10 July 2018, the Special Rapporteur sent a follow up visit request which also goes unanswered.
- **2 November 2015:** The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture sent a visit request. A reminder was sent on 24 January 2017.
- **16 November 2018:** The UN Special Rapporteur on the Environment issued a request to visit. If the above requests are anything to go by, the Chinese authorities will evade requests for monitoring. Environmental damage in Tibet and the forced relocation of Tibetan Nomads is a serious concern which must be urgently addressed.

The continued lack of response or even acknowledgement of requests from UN experts shows the Chinese authorities' total disregard for the importance of international human rights monitoring,

accountability and transparency. Unless countries such as the United Kingdom proactively speak out against the flaunting of these international mechanisms, the Chinese government will continue to operate as if the rules do not apply to them.

All-Party Parliamentary Group for Tibet

The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Tibet (APPGT) exists to put pressure on Her Majesty's Government to encourage negotiations between the Chinese Government and representatives of the Tibetan Government in exile, whilst recognising that Tibet is an occupied country which had independent links with Britain.

A key way in which the UK government can be urged to encourage independent access to Tibet is through MPs joining the APPGT. Throughout 2018, the APPGT has consistently raised the issue of access to Tibet. The group strongly believes that the human rights situation in Tibet must not evade the international spotlight. By joining the group, MPs can help foster a strong parliamentary voice that speaks out on human rights issues in Tibet and can continue this crucial work in 2019.

Further recommendations:

- The UK government should raise the issue of access with their Chinese counterparts and recommend that independent observers are granted unhindered and immediate access to Tibet, and to all individuals and relevant documents they deem necessary for their work.
- The UK government should urge the Chinese authorities to prevent and seek accountability for any threats, retaliations or reprisals against individuals for engaging with independent observers.