

Minister
of Foreign Affairs



Ministre
des Affaires étrangères

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0G2

July 7, 2020

Sherap Therchin and Co-signatories
Canada-Tibet Committee
300 Léo-Pariseau Street
Montréal QC H2X 4B3

Dear Sherap Therchin and Co-signatories:

Thank you for your letter of March 4, 2020, concerning the human rights situation of Tibetans. I greatly appreciate that you have informed me of the issues of concern for Tibet groups in Canada. I regret that I was unable to reply to you sooner due to the extraordinary circumstances brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The promotion and protection of human rights is a priority in the Government of Canada's engagement with China. Canada remains deeply concerned about the human rights situation affecting Tibetans, including restrictions on freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief, as well as the protection of linguistic and cultural rights.

Canada remains concerned about Tibetan prisoners of conscience and we note your request for officials to make interventions on specific cases along with your calls for humane treatment and the release of prisoners. Canada has continued to call on China to respect, protect and promote freedom of expression, assembly and association, as well as freedom of religion or belief for all. We have done so on numerous occasions, publicly and privately, in multilateral forums as well as in bilateral dialogues. For example, at the G20 Foreign Minister's meeting in Japan in November 2019, I raised the human rights situation in China directly with my Chinese counterpart during a bilateral meeting.

In terms of the protection and promotion of freedom of religion or belief, Canada has co-signed statements at the U.S.-led Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom in Washington, in July 2018 and 2019. Both statements raised concerns that many members of religious minority groups in China face severe repression and discrimination because of their beliefs, including Tibetan Buddhists. Canada continues to work closely with international partners to advance the freedom of persecuted faith and belief communities worldwide. In 2015, Canada established the International Contact Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief, convened biannually by Canada and the United States. It is an important platform which brings together nearly 30 countries committed to protecting and promoting freedom of religion or belief. It has helped advance coordinated initiatives concerning issues of religious minorities, including Tibetan Buddhists. The most recent meeting took place on March 4, 2020, in Geneva, Switzerland.

Canada

Canada has also made public recommendations to China on human rights as part of China's Universal Periodic Review at the United Nations Human Rights Council in November 2018. Therein, Canada called on China to end prosecution and persecution on the basis of religion or belief, including for Muslims, Christians, Tibetan Buddhists and Falun Gong. Canadian officials have also discussed Tibetan issues in conversations directly with Chinese counterparts.

You urged Canada to press China to agree to dates for a visit of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and issue a standing invitation to the UN Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council. Canada will continue to advocate in support of the request of the High Commissioner for unfettered access for an advance team in preparation for such a visit, in order to analyze the human rights situation in China in depth. Canadian diplomats in China have unfortunately not been permitted to access Tibet since 2015. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, pressing for access will be challenging. Nevertheless, Canada intends to continue to seek greater access to Tibet for diplomats and journalists.

I assure you that the promotion, protection and respect for human rights, including freedom of religion or belief, are core priorities of Canada's foreign policy. Canada will continue to call on the Government of China to respect the rights of Tibetans and to take steps to improve the human rights situation in Tibetan areas.

Thank you for writing.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'F. Champagne', with a stylized flourish at the end.

The Honourable François-Philippe Champagne, P.C., M.P.