

Minister
of Foreign Affairs



Ministre
des Affaires étrangères

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0G2

September 15, 2022

Mr. Ali Ehsassi
Chair
House of Commons Standing Committee
on Foreign Affairs and International Development
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Ehsassi:

On behalf of the Government of Canada, I would like to thank the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development (FAAE) for its report entitled, *Resumption of the Sino-Tibetan Dialogue*. I am pleased to receive the committee's report and would like to thank all members for dedicating their time and effort.

I note the recommendation "*That this Committee call for dialogue between representatives of the Tibetan people (His Holiness the Dalai Lama or his representatives and/or the Central Tibetan Administration) and the Government of the People's Republic of China with a view to enabling Tibet to exercise genuine autonomy within the framework of the Chinese constitution; report this motion to the House, and pursuant to Standing Order 109, request that the Government table a comprehensive response to the Report.*"

The Government agrees with this recommendation. Canada takes no position on the possible interlocutors for a dialogue as chosen by the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Tibetans.

The promotion and protection of human rights is an integral part of Canadian foreign policy and a long-standing priority in our relationship with China. Canada is committed to constructive exchanges with China across the spectrum of human rights concerns, including through high-level bilateral and multilateral engagements, public statements, advocacy, diplomatic dialogue, and close coordination with likeminded countries.

Canada has consistently called on China to respect, protect and promote the freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of assembly and association, and freedom of religion or belief of Tibetans and all Chinese citizens. Canadian officials continue to discuss Tibetan issues in direct bilateral conversations with Chinese counterparts. In Canada's view, a dialogue between Chinese and Tibetans would contribute to better mutual understanding and would allow for important channels of communication to be established.

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During my recent April and July 2022 interactions with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, I raised Canada's concerns with China's human rights record. I will continue to call on the Government of China to respect religious freedoms, culture, language and end repressive policies in line with China's own constitutions and its international obligations.

Canada has consistently advocated for substantive and meaningful dialogue between the Chinese government and the Dalai Lama or representatives of the Tibetan people to work toward a resolution of issues acceptable to both sides. As background, the Government of China ended a previous "Sino-Tibet dialogue" (2002-2010) process in 2010. One of the reasons included the Dalai Lama retiring from political life and dissolving his political authority, replacing it with a political leader (i.e., the Sikyong of the Central Tibetan Administration) democratically elected by Tibetans in exile around the world. China does not recognize the CTA and firmly opposes all forms of contact between foreign officials and the Dalai Lama.

In terms of dialogue, the Dalai Lama has outlined a non-violent "Middle Way" approach within China that sees Tibet accepting being part of China while rejecting the current status quo. The Middle Way seeks genuine autonomy, stability and co-existence obtained through dialogue. The CTA seeks a resumption of dialogue to facilitate this relationship with the Government of China.

The Government of Canada continues to closely monitor the concerning human rights situation in Tibet and officials continue to raise concerns over the treatment of Tibetans both publicly and privately with Chinese counterparts. In terms of actions in multilateral fora, on June 22, 2021, Canada delivered a joint statement confronting and challenging China on the human rights situation in Xinjiang at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, co-signed with 43 other countries, which referenced the situation in Tibet. On March 11, 2021, at the 46th session of Human Rights Council in Geneva, Canada expressed concerns over deeply troubling reports of deaths in the custody of Tibetans. As part of China's Universal Periodic Review at the United Nations Human Rights Council in November 2018, 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.

Canada will continue to call on China to respect the human rights of its citizens and to advocate for the release of Chinese citizens detained or imprisoned for exercising their human rights. Canada will continue to closely monitor the cases of Tibetan human rights defenders who have been detained. This includes seeking trial attendance where possible. Officials will continue to advocate directly to Chinese authorities for unhindered future access to the Tibet Autonomous Region for UN agencies, academics, researchers, and foreign correspondents, as well as ongoing visits by Canadian diplomats. Canada will continue to press for unhindered access to the Tibet Autonomous Region for the Tibetan people and speak-out for their rights and freedoms.

Once again, on behalf of the Government of Canada, I would like to thank the members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development for the diligence and commitment undertaken in your work.

Sincerely,

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

The Honourable Mélanie Joly, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Foreign Affairs