

Minister
of Foreign Affairs



Ministre
des Affaires étrangères

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0G2

October 13, 2023

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 Subcommittee on Human Rights (SDIR) of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development (FAAE) for its report entitled, "*The Human Rights Situation of Tibetans and the Chinese Residential Boarding School and Pre-School System*". I am pleased to receive the Committee's Report and recommendations and thank all members for dedicating their time and effort.

The allegations of human rights violations to which the Committee's report refers are serious and disturbing. For Canadians, they are made all the more painful in light of our own country's experience with residential schools and its devastating, multi-generational impacts on Indigenous Peoples.

Any country that faces such serious and credible allegations of human rights violations must respond with transparency; the People's Republic of China (PRC) is no exception. Canada will continue to advocate for unhindered access to the Tibet Autonomous Region and Xinjiang for UN experts, academics, researchers, and foreign correspondents, as well as by Canadian and likeminded diplomats. Canada works strategically with partner countries and organizations to press the PRC to take action to account for its human rights record. Drawing on a broad range of diplomatic tools, Canada and its partners seek to employ the most effective means available to draw attention to the PRC's violations of international human rights norms and of its obligations under international human rights law. This includes advocating on a range of human rights issues, including minority rights, cultural rights, the right to education, and freedom of religion or belief. More specifically, it includes raising Canada's concerns over the treatment of Tibetans both publicly and privately with Chinese counterparts, including in multilateral fora.

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Multilateral Action

Canada will continue to take action at the United Nations (UN). The UN General Assembly and the UN Human Rights Council sessions present opportunities to draw attention to the concerns raised by four UN human rights Special Rapporteurs and by two human rights treaty bodies about the PRC's residential school system. Having already raised these issues bilaterally with the PRC, Canada is leveraging these opportunities to call on the PRC in front of all UN member states to address these concerns meaningfully.

These efforts build on previous actions we have taken in multilateral fora, in tandem with partner countries. At the margins of the 51st session of Human Rights Council in October 2022, Canada co-sponsored a Side Event on the "Human Rights Implications of the Dalai Lama's succession" with partner countries including the United States, the United Kingdom, Lithuania and Czechia. On June 22, 2021, Canada delivered a joint statement confronting and challenging China at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on the human rights situation in Xinjiang, 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 the deaths of Tibetans held in custody.

Freedom of Religion or Belief

Canada has a long history of promoting freedom of religion or belief, and remains steadfast in its commitment to protect human rights, including the freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) and firmly believes that no one should experience hatred, violence or fear because of their faith. The Government of Canada remains deeply concerned about the situation of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima (the 11th Panchen Lama of Tibet). Canada first raised the case of the Panchen Lama with Chinese authorities in 1995. In 1998, the Canadian Embassy in Beijing delivered to Chinese counterparts 1,000 birthday cards for the Panchen Lama from Canadian children.

Over the years, Canada has requested that China provide information on the Panchen Lama and his parents, and has called on China to allow the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief to be granted access to the Panchen Lama. Canada recognizes that under Tibetan Buddhist religious traditions that have endured for centuries, the Panchen Lama is responsible for identifying the reincarnation of the next Dalai Lama. We also recognize that the right to freedom of religion or belief includes the freedom of religious groups—including Tibetan Buddhists—to choose their own religious and spiritual leaders without outside interference.

Resumption of Sino-Tibetan Dialogue

As reiterated in the Government's Response to the FAAE Report "Resumption of Sino-Tibetan Dialogue" (September 15, 2022), Canada continues to support and advocate 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. Canada encourages both sides to engage in dialogue without preconditions. Canada's approach is to encourage better understanding, promote the rights and freedoms of the Tibetan people, and achieve a durable solution. In Canada's view, for any future dialogue, it would be up to the parties to determine their representation and to make decisions on modalities of engagement.

Immigration

Canada has a long and proud humanitarian tradition of coming to the assistance of people displaced by persecution, conflict, or massive violations of human rights. The Government of Canada has significantly expanded the protection spaces available to resettled refugees in recent years, from approximately 12,300 refugees resettled in 2014 to approximately 46,500 in 2022. As part of this broader expansion of resettlement opportunities for refugees, in 2021 the Government of Canada created a dedicated stream for human rights defenders, working in close collaboration with civil society organizations dedicated to the protection of human rights defenders. The stream initially created 250 new spaces for human rights defenders annually, in addition to planned refugee resettlement targets. On July 25, 2023, the Government of Canada announced an expansion of the stream for human rights defenders from 250 to 500 spaces, for human rights defenders and their family members.

Protecting Canadians

Canada is home to a large population of people of Chinese origin or with ties to China. The Government has heard many testimonials of people living in Canada facing harassment, intimidation, and transnational repression from the Chinese government. In addition, Canada will continue to hold regular consultations with civil society organizations, via the Amnesty International-led Canadian Coalition on Human Rights in China (CCHRC), on current priority human rights concerns related to China. Consultation topics will include, but not be limited to, the organized and sustained campaign of intimidation and harassment aimed at activists working on China-related human rights issues in Canada, in circumstances suggesting the involvement or backing of the Chinese government.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) takes threats to the security of individuals living in

Canada very seriously and is aware that foreign states may seek to intimidate or harm communities or individuals within Canada. The RCMP has confirmed that it has shut down illegal police activity in Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia connected to the alleged Chinese “police stations” and continues its active national investigation of reports of criminal activity in relation to these “police stations”.

Protecting our country against the threats posed by foreign interference is a responsibility that the Government of Canada takes very seriously. The Government of Canada continues to review the tools and authorities at its disposal to ensure our approach keeps pace with the evolving threat environment and is adapted to the Canadian context. In March 2023, the Government of Canada launched public and stakeholder consultations on a Foreign Influence Transparency Registry (FITR). Such a registry would ensure transparency and accountability from those who advocate on behalf of a foreign government and reinforce protection to communities, including the Tibetan community, who are often targeted by attempts at foreign interference. These consultations with key stakeholders and the Canadian public, which are ongoing, will inform the path forward, including potential legislation.

On September 7, 2023, the Government announced the establishment of a Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference in Federal Election Processes and Democratic Institutions led by the Honourable Marie-Josée Hogue (puisne judge of the Québec Court of Appeal).

The Government has taken several recent actions to bolster our approach and protect communities facing state-backed harassment, intimidation, and interference in Canada. This includes the establishment of a dedicated *National Counter-Foreign Interference Coordinator* within Public Safety Canada, as announced by the Prime Minister on March 6, 2023, to enable the Government of Canada to shift to a more proactive and coordinated approach in addressing current and emerging threats. The Office of the Counter-Foreign Interference Coordinator will provide a dedicated focus on foreign interference and will reinforce protections to targeted communities, including the Tibetan community in Canada.

The Government of Canada reserves the right to impose measures in response to violations of international human rights, including sanctions. Sanctions are one of a range of tools available to hold the PRC to account. Canada stands ready to levy sanctions if and when most effective. Canada continues to implement other measures to address concerns over human rights in China. For example, in coordination with international partners, Canada implemented measures to reduce the risk of Canadian businesses either knowingly or unknowingly having ties to forced labour in China.

Project Funding

Canada offers a number of mechanisms for funding projects that address issues of development and human rights. Organizations can always submit proposals for project funding, including through the Global Affairs Canada Portal or in response to a call for proposals for the *Canada Fund for Local Initiatives* (CFLI) program of the High Commission of Canada in India. Each proposal is carefully assessed and a decision is made based on the merits of the proposal, alignment with policy priorities, and availability of funds at the time.

Global Affairs Canada currently supports an international assistance project titled *Enhancement of the Education and Resilience of Tibetan Youth*, with Alinea International, worth \$6.1 million, building on previous \$2 million project entitled *Improving Education Quality and Learning for Tibetan Children* (2015 – 2017), which supported the improvement of educational attainment levels of Tibetan youth living in Nepal and India to help them access post-secondary education and improve gainful employment opportunities. The current project aims to improve the quality of the education system and the broader environment for Tibetan female and male youth in India and Nepal to support their transition from secondary to post-secondary education or work. The project continues until August 31, 2024.

In the case of the CFLI, Canadian Embassies and High Commissions are dependent on local civil society organizations submitting relevant and well-designed project proposals before the mission is able to fund a project or theme in any given year. Canadian missions with CFLI programs accomplish this through their annual Call for Proposal processes, and local partners decide what themes and activities they want to focus their project proposals on. The Embassy of Canada to China follows these practices with their CFLI program.

The Government of Canada recognizes the ongoing need for research and information gathering on the human rights situation in China. Canada acknowledges that this issue has become much more difficult in recent years. As such, in January 2023, Global Affairs Canada created a new *Centre for China Policy Research* to enhance the Canadian government's understanding and ability to react and be proactive on all China-related issues and developments.

Once again, on behalf of the Government of Canada, we would like to thank the members of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development for the diligence and commitment demonstrated in your work. As you can see, the Government continues to work with international partners to take action on the PRC's human rights violations against Tibetans and to hold the PRC to account for its human rights record across the board. I look forward to continued collaboration with your Committee in pursuit of these goals.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue 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