



EUROPEAN UNION

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Speech by High Representative Catherine Ashton in the European Parliament on the situation in Tibet, 12 June 2012, Strasbourg

Defence and promotion of human rights around the world is a key component of the EU's foreign policy. In this context, the EU follows closely the human rights situation in Tibet. The EU considers its human rights dialogue with China as an essential part of the EU-China relationship. In this context, it is committed to engage with China to improve the situation on the ground.

The European Union is concerned by the deterioration of the situation in Tibet, as illustrated by the wave of self immolations and by clashes between the police and the local population since the beginning of the year.

In recent days, the EU has been particularly concerned by the news of mass arrests and detentions taking place in the Tibetan Autonomous Region following self-immolations in Lhasa, as well as at reports that the TAR, has been closed to foreigners.

Some 37 self-immolations of Tibetans have occurred in China since 2011. These have been concentrated in Sichuan province but have also taken place in other Tibetan-populated areas where increasing restrictions on religious activities seem to have given rise to a surge of frustration and new protests among Tibetans.

Over the last three years, an increasing number of Tibetan intellectuals and cultural figures have faced criminal charges or been imprisoned. The EU is worried by restrictions on expressions of Tibetan identity and freedom of expression in Tibet.

P R E S S

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The EU has taken note that the five-year plans adopted by the Chinese authorities in January and March 2011 include an expansion of hydropower, railways, mining and tourism across the Tibetan plateau. The EU welcomes China's wish to raise the living standards of the Tibetan population. However, there are reports of growing discontent among Tibetans regarding local development policies and of protests against mining and hydro-electric projects.

The EU supports the wish of the Chinese authorities to better protect the environment in China. Nevertheless, it is most concerned about the impact of the resettlement policy of Tibetan nomads. Tibetan culture and traditional lifestyles are based on a nomadic way of life. While taking note of the Chinese authorities commitment that the resettlement of nomads is intended to preserve the Tibetan grasslands, the EU questions whether the objective of environmental protection can only be reached by eliminating the traditional way of life of Tibetans who have lived in harmony with nature for centuries. The EU is concerned that compulsory resettlement of all nomads has the potential to destroy the distinctive Tibetan culture and identity.

The EU is also worried by the impact of the policy to make Mandarin Chinese the primary language of instruction in Tibetan schools, as in schools in other minority-populated areas. Several hundreds of students protested against the reform of the education system to promote education in Chinese rather than in Tibetan in Qinghai province.

The EU is also concerned about the intensification of restrictions on religious activities in Tibet, including quotas of monks and nuns who may reside at a monastery and measures limiting their travel between different areas.

The EU raised all these issues at the EU-China human rights dialogue on 29 May 2012.

The EU calls upon the Chinese authorities to ensure that the human rights of the Tibetan people are respected, including their right to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, as well as to enjoy their own culture to practise their own religion and to use their own language.

The EU also urges the Chinese authorities to exercise restraint and to allow access by foreign diplomats and journalists to all Tibetan autonomous areas.

Following the last meeting between the Chinese authorities and the Envoys of the Dalai Lama in early 2010, the EU strongly supports the restart of the dialogue between all parties in order to contribute to a durable solution. The EU believes that this dialogue can contribute to the improvement of the human rights situation of the Tibetan people.