

19th EU-China Summit and 35th EU-China Human Rights Dialogue held in Brussels

The 19th bilateral Summit between the European Union and China took place on 2 June in Brussels. It was followed by the 35th round of the EU-China Human Rights dialogue, which was held in the Belgian capital on 22 and 23 June.



European Council President Donald Tusk and Chinese Premier Li Keqiang arrive at the EU-China Summit in Brussels on 2 June. (Photo: Reuters)

Cooperation on environmental issues was high on the agenda of the Summit, which took place a few days after U.S. President Trump announced that the United States would withdraw from the 2015 Paris Agreement, and the EU and China reaffirmed their willingness to tackle climate change. The EU was represented by European Council President Donald Tusk and European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, and China by its Prime Minister

Li Keqiang. They discussed EU-China political and economic relations and exchanged views on foreign policy and security challenges, including the situation in the Korean Peninsula.

In his [remarks](#) following the summit, President Tusk said: “We also discussed the issue of human rights today (...) I expressed our concern about freedom of expression and association in China, including the detention of human rights

lawyers and defenders, as well as the situation of minorities such as Tibetans and Uighurs.”

Outside the Summit on 2 June, over 200 people, including members of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities, joined a [rally](#) organised by ICT and a coalition of NGOs urging the EU to take a strong stand on the deteriorating human rights situation in China. Ahead of the high-level

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meeting, ICT, along with 15 other NGOs, addressed [a joint letter to EU leaders](#), calling on them to raise both privately and publicly the degradation of human rights in China.

The EU-China Summit was followed on 22 and 23 June by the 35th round of the EU-China Human Rights dialogue, which consisted of the dialogue itself and a roundtable discussion between European and



Members of the Tibetan Community in Belgium at the rally in the margins of the EU-China Summit on 2 June. (Photo: ICT)

Chinese participants (including Members of the European Parliament, representatives from civil society and academia) on the first day, and a field visit to the refugee centre Bruxelles-Petit-Château on the second day.

Many issues were on the agenda of the two-day programme, such as migration and the rights of refugees, freedom of religion and belief, the rights of persons belonging to minorities, especially in Tibet and Xinjiang, and freedom of peaceful assembly and association, including the implementation of China's Foreign NGO Activity Management Law.

The EU had the opportunity to raise the cases of Chinese political prisoners and detained human rights defenders and activists, including three Tibetans: Tashi Wangchuk, Druklo and Lobsang Kunchok. It said it expected that *"all individuals detained in connection with their advocacy of human rights be released from custody, that they should be allowed to be represented by a lawyer of their choosing, be given the possibility of meeting their family members, have access to appropriate medical assistance when required, and have allegations of their mistreatment promptly investigated"*.

ICT is extremely concerned about the state of this dialogue, which has been marred almost since its inception by a lack of clearly articulated

benchmarks for progress and the exclusion of independent Chinese voices, and was held at a lower governmental level on China's side - and after more than a year without a round of talks. In a joint NGO [statement](#) released before the dialogue, it urged the EU to "cancel its upcoming human rights dialogue with China and suspend the exchange until the meetings can bring genuine human rights improvements."

To read the European External Action Service's official press release on the dialogue, click [here](#). ■

EU Ambassadors visit Tibet Autonomous Region

The EU Ambassador to China, Hans Dietmar Schweisgut, and a group of Ambassadors of EU member states to China, paid an official visit to the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) from 26-30 June, at the invitation of the TAR authorities, according to a [press release](#) issued by the European External Action Service ahead of the visit. The agenda included meetings with leaders of TAR in Lhasa and with representatives from the TAR Bureau of Education, the Bureau of Health and Family Planning, the Development and Reform Commission and the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission. The Ambassadors were to discuss the economic and social development of TAR, as well as issues of religion, education and human rights, among others.

The last official visit from the EU side to TAR took place in September 2013, when the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, Stavros Lambrinidis, was invited to visit TAR. ■

China under scrutiny at the 35th session of the UN Human Rights Council



Philip Alston, UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, attends a news conference in Beijing in August 2016. (Photo: Reuters/Jason Lee)

At the 35th session of the UN Human Rights Council, which took place between 6-23 June in Geneva, China was once more under strong scrutiny from UN observers, States and NGOs.

In a [newly published report](#) on his country visit to China in August 2016, Philip Alston, the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, wrote that the plight of Tibetans and Uighurs were “deeply problematic”. He stated: “Most ethnic minorities in China are exposed to serious human rights challenges, including significantly higher poverty rates, ethnic discrimination and forced relocation.”

In his report, presented at the 35th session of the UN Human Rights Council on 7 June, Alston further challenged the Chinese government’s claim that “nationalities” in China enjoy equality as guaranteed by the Chinese constitution and criticised the “head in the sand”

mentality of the Chinese department dealing with ethnic minorities, saying that – while implementing “top-down” and “one-size fits all policies” – it insisted that there had been “no resistance to its poverty alleviation projects” and “no protests”. The report additionally listed various attempts by the Chinese authorities to obstruct his fact-finding mission through intimidation, surveillance and restriction of movement, and preventing him from meeting “with the great majority of civil society actors with any degree of freedom or confidentiality.”

In a [statement](#) on behalf of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, ICT’s Vincent Metten commended this report, and urged the members of the Human Rights Council to “support the Special Rapporteur’s call for a ‘comprehensive set of policies designed to ensure that human rights considerations are prominent in, rather than absent from, all aspects of its policy-making in the People’s Republic of China.’”

This session of the Human Rights Council also saw France, Germany, Switzerland, the [UK](#) and the [U.S.](#) raise concerns about the human rights situation in China and Tibet. ICT was particularly pleased to see [Germany](#) express deep worries about the “widespread human rights abuses in China, especially in Tibet, Xinjiang and neighbouring regions, including infringements on the freedom of religion as witnessed in Larung Gar”, and to urge China to immediately release all detained human rights defenders, including Tibetan language activist Tashi Wangchuk.

ICT’s Mélanie Blondelle, speaking on behalf of the Helsinki Foundation for



The Tibet Solidarity Rally held in front of the Palais des Nations in Geneva on 9 June. (Photo: Office of Tibet)

Human Rights, also [expressed](#) concern about the continuing wave of self-

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Karmapa discusses climate change and Tibet Third Pole during first visit to UK



His Holiness the Karmapa gave a three-part teaching on the “Eight Verses for Training the Mind,” in London’s Battersea Park. (Photo: Olivier Adam)

During his first visit to the UK between 17-28 May, the Karmapa, a prominent Tibetan Buddhist leader, spoke about Tibet’s critical environmental significance as the earth’s Third Pole, and on the importance of the stewardship of the Tibetan environment by Tibetan people themselves.

The Karmapa gave a two-day teaching to thousands of Buddhists and others in London’s Battersea Park, and held a private meeting with Prince Charles, known for his passionate concern for the environment and Tibet. He visited a Hindu temple, presided over a ceremony at the Tibetan Peace Garden in the grounds of the Imperial War Museum, before blessing thousands of Nepalese and Indians at a ceremony organized by the Buddhist Community Centre UK. He also addressed the Tibetan community in Britain and launched his book *‘Interconnected: Embracing Life in Our Global Society’*.

The Karmapa also spoke about Tibet’s critical environmental significance, saying: *“When it comes to protecting the environment of Tibet, one of the best sources to consult is the Tibetan people themselves, as they have related to it for thousands of years. Knowing it inside and out, they naturally understand how to create a sustainable environment. Their whole hearts and minds are invested there. The Tibetans’ traditional approach to the environment sees it as a sacred field inhabited by gods and spirits. Their outlook has great sincerity and respect for their natural world.”*

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immolations in Tibet, which has resulted in at least 150 Tibetans setting themselves ablaze since 2009. She urged the Council to “call on China to grant independent and impartial monitors unfettered access to Tibet, as agreed to by China following its 2013 Universal Periodic Review”. The Chinese delegation used its Right of Reply to blame the Tibetan self-immolations as being “manipulated by the Dalai clique”.

Coinciding with the session of the Human Rights Council, a massive rally to call on the international community and the United Nations to act on Tibet was also held in Geneva on 9 June. The rally, organised by the Tibetan Community in Switzerland & Liechtenstein, the Swiss Tibetan Friendship Association and the International Campaign for Tibet, was attended by more than a thousand Tibetans and Tibet supporters, along with speakers from six European countries. They spoke about the deteriorating human rights situation in Tibet, particularly the recent spate of self-immolations this year. ■

The 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje, is the head of the Karma Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism and the only Tibetan reincarnate lama to be acknowledged by both the Chinese government and the Dalai Lama. Having escaped into exile in India in 2000, he traces his interest in the environment to being born and brought up in a nomadic family in eastern Tibet.

On 24 May, he joined the former Archbishop of Canterbury Lord Rowan Williams and scientists, scholars and cultural figures for a roundtable discussion on the environment hosted by the International Campaign for Tibet and Inspire Dialogue Foundation in Cambridge. The gathering was intended to bring together perspectives “between disciplines and generations” as the start of an ongoing dialogue. On this occasion, ICT’s Director of Communications Kate Saunders gave a presentation on Chinese policies of nomad settlement and the implications of China creating nature reserves on the Tibetan plateau. ■

New ruling bans Tibetan children in Lhasa from prayer during holy month



Children from a primary school in Lhasa “speaking [their] hearts to Grandpa [President] Xi” as part of the “Four Emphases and Four Loves” campaign. (Photo: vtibet)

In a new ruling issued in May, teachers and parents at a school in Lhasa were ordered to prevent children from participating in religious activities during the important Buddhist anniversary month of Saga Dawa.

The sacred time of Saga Dawa, the anniversary of the Buddha’s birth, enlightenment and death, is seen as a good time for Buddhist practice through offering prayers, giving alms to beggars, refraining from eating meat and seeking to act with compassion and kindness.

But this year, a document circulated by a primary school in Lhasa on 27 May stated that parents must make sure their children “are not involved in any type of superstitious and religious activity” during their summer holiday, and that they, as parents, must not engage in such practice either. The instructions, issued by the Je-bumgang (Chinese: Ji Peng Gang) Elementary School in Lhasa, gave clear instructions that children should not participate in such actions. This is evidence of Chinese authorities targeting a younger generation as part

of a systematic ideological drive.

The focus on preventing children from expressing religious devotion is part of a [new political campaign](#) in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) aimed at diluting “the negative impact of religion”, and focused around the ‘[Four Loves](#)’ (defined as the “core interests” of the Chinese Communist Party), as part of an intensified control agenda in the year of the 19th Party Congress. Ideological campaigns are being increasingly emphasized at higher levels of the education system in Tibet. Early in May, the Sichuan Party Committee held a political work conference in Chengdu for universities and colleges in order to “convey and implement Chinese President Xi Jinping’s key instructions on ideological and political work”. ■

U.S. President Trump proposes cuts to Tibet programmes

The International Campaign for Tibet is concerned by the reduction of financial support to Tibet programmes proposed in President Donald Trump’s fiscal year 2018 budget.

For the last few decades, the U.S. State Department has supported humanitarian and development assistance programmes for the Tibetan people, both in Tibet and in exile, to enable Tibetans to preserve and promote their distinct culture, identity and way of life, and to empower them economically. This assistance over the years has had a positive impact on the development of the Tibetan community.

The State Department, which sent the detailed proposal to the Congress as part of Trump’s annual budget, described the move as one of the “tough choices” it had to make as its budget itself has been slashed by more than 28 per cent.

ICT is concerned by this proposal, and has already reached out to the offices of the relevant Committees in both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. It will be following up on this, as Congress will now take up the President’s budget proposal.

Meanwhile, as the Trump Administration prepares to name the next level of officials for the State Department, 37 members of the Congress have [written](#) to President Trump reminding him of his statutory obligation established under the Tibetan Policy Act of 2002 to appoint a Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues. ■

Political Prisoner Focus

Gendun Drakpa and Lobsang Sherab

According to a [report](#) by Radio Free Asia, Gendun Drakpa and Lobsang Sherab, two Tibetan monks missing since last year after being detained by police in Sichuan, have been given prison terms for engaging in 'separatist activities'.

A Tibetan living in India told RFA that Gendun Drakpa, 40, and Lobsang Sherab, 36, were put on trial in mid-June and convicted of passing politically sensitive information to contacts outside Dzoegé (in Chinese, Ruo'ergai) county in the Ngaba (Aba) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture.

"They were not allowed to seek the assistance of a lawyer and were not given a chance to speak in their own defence," the source said. "They were also not allowed to meet with their parents or other relatives."

Drakpa was sentenced to five years in prison, while Sherab was

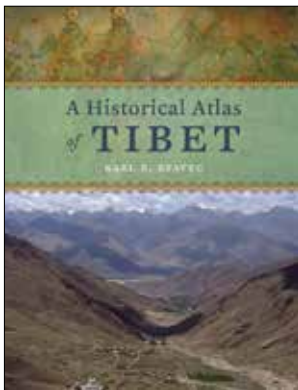
handed a four-year term. It was not clear what information the monks were accused of passing or who the recipients were.

According to RFA's source, Tibetans attending the trial as witnesses were forced to surrender their mobile phones to police. Authorities in Tibetan-populated areas of China closely monitor Tibetans' use of mobile phones and social media, and harshly punish anyone spreading news or images of self-immolations and other protests challenging Chinese rule. On 4 May, a 42-year-old monk named Gonpo was for example [detained](#) on suspicion of disseminating information to foreign contacts about recent self-immolations.

When Drakpa was detained in August 2016, he was working as treasurer of Ngaba's Thangkor Soktsang monastery, where Sherab was a worker in the monastery's store, sources told RFA in [earlier reports](#). ■

Reading Suggestion

A Historical Atlas of Tibet, by Karl E. Ryavec



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The product of 12 years of research and eight years map-making, A Historical Atlas of Tibet documents cultural and religious sites across the Tibetan Plateau and its bordering regions, from Paleolithic and Neolithic times up to today. It spans the five main periods in Tibetan history, and offers introductory maps of each followed by details of western, central, and eastern regions. It beautifully visualises the history of Tibetan Buddhism, tracing its spread throughout Asia, with thousands of temples mapped, both within Tibet and across North China and Mongolia, all the way to Beijing. There are maps of major polities and their territorial administrations, as well as of the kingdoms of Guge and Purang in western Tibet, and of Derge and Nangchen in Kham. There are town plans of Lhasa and maps that focus on history and language, population, natural resources and contemporary politics.

Extraordinarily comprehensive and visually stunning, this overdue volume is a cornerstone in cartography, Asian studies, Buddhist studies, and in the libraries or on the coffee tables of anyone who has felt the draw of the landscapes, people and cultures of the highest place on Earth. ■

UPCOMING EVENTS

▶ SEPTEMBER:

36th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council

▶ AUTUMN 2017:

19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China

▶ SECOND HALF OF 2017:

6th 16+1 Summit in Hungary (tbc)