

Coalition urges Prime Minister to put human rights on his agenda in China

OTTAWA, December 1, 2009 — On the eve of Prime Minister Stephen Harper's first official visit to China, the **Canadian Coalition on Human Rights in China** strongly urges him to publicly push for improvement in China's poor human rights record.

"The Prime Minister must not be persuaded that speaking out on human rights concerns is counterproductive or inappropriate to the occasion," said Alex Neve, of Amnesty International, one of ten organizations in the Coalition. "The government of Canada must show moral courage in addressing human rights issues with Chinese authorities."

The Coalition urges Prime Minister Harper to show that Canada views human rights as a central plank of its relationship with China. There have been two recent examples of the Canadian government taking a clear stand on cases of individual Chinese dissidents—both the activist Lu Decheng and journalist Jiang Weiping have been able to settle in Canada with their families because Canadian officials took action.

Some critics argue that pressing the Chinese government on human rights concerns is bad for business, insisting that Canada's trade with China will suffer. But "trade statistics do not support that position," said Cheuk Kwan, of the Toronto Association for Democracy in China. "Quiet diplomacy with China has not benefited Canada economically, nor does frankness about Canadians' concerns over China's human rights record hurt Canada economically."

In 1997, when the Canadian government abandoned public criticism of human rights violations in China and opted instead for a policy of quiet diplomacy, Canada had a 1.41% share of the market for total imports into China. During the years of quiet diplomacy, that dropped—to 1.06% in 2003 and

.97% in 2006. More recently, the government suspended the quiet human rights dialogue process with China and, coincidentally or not, Canada's share of Chinese imports modestly increased to 1.12% in 2008.

“Dialogue on sensitive issues like human rights is not only appropriate,” said Neve, “It is a measure of the respect between nations.”

Twenty years after the Tiananmen Square massacre, China's human rights record continues to deteriorate by almost every measure. Despite much-touted promises, the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games did not bring about positive changes to the rule of law and respect for the rights of citizens. Instead they led to numerous human rights violations.

“Thousands of Chinese, Uyghur, and Tibetan activists and human rights lawyers continue to face arbitrary detention, harassment and imprisonment following unfair trials,” said Tenzin Wangkhang, Students for a Free Tibet Canada. “Authorities continue to execute more people than the rest of the world combined.”

The coalition has provided the government with a list of eleven cases to raise with Chinese authorities, and also asks that the case of Huseyin Celil, a Canadian citizen of Uyghur origin, serving a life prison term in China after an unfair trial, be discussed.

The letter to the Prime Minister was signed by the following members of the Canadian Coalition on Human Rights in China:—Amnesty International Canada (English branch), Amnistic international Canada francophone, Canada Tibet Committee, Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, Falun Dafa Association of Canada, Federation for a Democratic China, PEN Canada, Vancouver Society in Support of Democratic Movement in China, Students for a Free Tibet Canada, Toronto Association for Democracy in China, the Uyghur Canadian Association, and the Movement for Democracy in China (Calgary).

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