

Meeting of the Cross Party Group on Tibet, 11th January 2017, 6pm, Committee Room 4

Attendees:

Chair: Linda Fabiani MSP

MSPs: Tavish Scott MSP, Ross Greer MSP

Guest Speaker: Norman Baker, President of the Tibet Society

Secretary: Martin Mills

Treasurer: David Lloyd Hudson

Others Attending: 14 members of the public.

Minutes of last meeting 5th October 2106:

The Chair wished the group happy New Year, notes the good attendance and offers welcome to Norman Baker, President of the Tibet Society.

Item 1.

Minutes from the previous meeting were approved, proposed by Roger Eames and seconded by the Treasurer David Hudson. Following a brief discussion, it was agreed that the names of members of the public attending the meeting would be kept for record-keeping purposes, but would be included in publicly available minutes on an opt-in basis. The chair reiterated the rules that a minimum of 2 MSPs must be present for an official CPG meeting (this rule being met with the attendance of Linda Fabiani MSP, Tavish Scott MSP and Ross Greer MSP).

Item 2: Discussion of Matter Arising -

2 a) Sikyong's visit to London

Treasurer David Hudson commented on the Tibetan Sikyong, Lobsang Sangay's visit to Westminster last November (2016) noting the welcome extended to the Sikyong from the House Speaker John Bercow, while watching the house debate. The Sikyong met with the All-Party Group for Tibet chaired by Tim Loughton MP with a total of 10 MPs in attendance, where he discussed the destruction of temples and expulsion of monks and nuns within Tibet, and the environmental damage on the Tibetan Plateau. He urged MPs to stand up for democracy and freedom for Tibetans. Scotland's efforts were noted in Dharamsala. In an interview for the BBC world service, world leaders were called upon to stand by national values when dealing with China.

b) Upcoming March 10 event

Brief discussion regarding plans for March 10, 2017. Sonam indicated positively regarding plans amongst the Tibetan community and will let the group know once more concrete plans are made.

c) Report on Holyrood Exhibition

Following discussions from the previous meeting held 5 October 2016, further thoughts took place regarding the possibility of an exhibition at the Scottish Parliament. The Secretary outlined that the exhibition is feasible, giving an approximate two year time scale which would coincide with March 2019 and the 60th anniversary of 1959, with an estimated cost of £20,000. Possible funding could be obtained from the AHRC, Creative Scotland, Rubin Museum, New York. The treasurer mentioned the possibility of funding from the E.U while this is still available. The Secretary raised awareness of the stringent requirements pertaining to political bias when hosting an exhibition within the Scottish parliament. Potential sources of material for the exhibition were given by the Secretary, which included the University of Aberdeen and the National Museum of Scotland. The curator from the University of Aberdeen, Dr Neil Curtis, who has previous experience running such events at Holyrood, was now involved as part of the exhibition. While perfectly doable, the Secretary noted that the exhibition would involve considerable effort and would require volunteers and a coordinated effort and asked the group if they still wanted to go ahead with plans for the exhibition. Volunteers were sought for helping with the exhibition, and these were forthcoming, particularly from representatives of the Tibetan Community in Scotland.

The conveyor Linda Fabiani suggested meeting fairly quickly, perhaps in different meetings to discuss the message of the exhibition and other details. It was suggested that fairly regular meetings to discuss the exhibition should be conducted by some members outside of the CPG official meetings. Possibilities were also mentioned regarding hoisting the exhibition elsewhere, such as London and Cardiff. A lengthy discussion then followed on possible items within the exhibition.

2 e) Correspondence Received.

As an introduction to the guest speaker, Norman Baker, President of the Tibet Society, Martin Mills read out a letter received from MP Tim Loughton in his capacity of Chair of the Westminster All-Party Group on Tibet. The letter asked to a) keep Tibetan issues in the limelight and b) to work closer with each other and other groups such as the Tibet Society. The letter also stated that according to a recent report issued by Freedom House index, Tibet is the least free country in the world.

3. Main Speaker: Norman Baker, President of the Tibet Society and member of the APPG on Tibet in Westminster.

Norman Baker discussed the work of the Tibet Society acknowledging that it is the oldest Tibet support group with a historical record of influence upon the British government. The Tibet Society is a small operation with only two permanent members of staff. The Tibet Society had visited the Welsh Assembly in Cardiff two weeks prior. Mr. Baker reiterated Tim Loughton's correspondence by emphasizing the importance of groups working together with no reason not to share agendas and campaigns which could echo the work done in London.

Mr. Baker indicated the continued need to challenge the Chinese government and mentioned the issue of Confucius Institutes associated with British Universities saying that over £10 million had been invested in Confucius institutes over the past few years. Mr. Baker then emphasized the need to keep Tibet and

Human Rights issues generally on the public radar. Again reiterating comments from Tim Loughton MP correspondence, the Freedom House Index placed Tibet less free than Syria or North Korea. Mr. Baker said that China is currently so powerful the public rarely hears of Human Rights abuses and thus we need to act in unison to get our voices heard.

Linking to the information presented by the Treasurer David Hudson, Mr. Baker informed the group that the Tibet Society had coordinated the Sikyong's visit to London where the Sikyong also met with the Foreign Office. It was noted by Mr. Baker that the Chinese government complained about the Sikyong's visit to Westminster.

Mr. Baker emphasized the need to look towards common collaborations in particular exchange of meetings, agendas, information and campaign strategies and mentioned the Tibet Society's links with the CTA.

The Tibet Society's campaign themes for 2017 were presented as:

- 1) Environmental issues and water supplies. Highlighted was a recent report issues by the International Campaign for Tibet entitled "Tibet's Water and Global Climate Change".
- 2) Religious Freedom and the future issue of the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama. Mr Baker raised the problem of religious curtailment and usurpation by the Chinese government highlighting the PRC's stated aim of validating the future Dalai Lama themselves. David Hudson asked if it would be possible to arrange a motion on the issue of the future reincarnation of the Dalai Lama within the Scottish parliament. Linda Fabiani agreed to the writing of a letter to the British government to ask the British government their stance on the issue of the Dalai Lama's future reincarnation; noting the letter should be written in a subtle and cautious manner.
- 3) Tourism in Tibet. Mr. Baker noted how tourism in Tibet has been used as a propaganda tool for the PRC.

Mr. Baker also noted the need to bring the Indian government on board and suggested that India can be engaged with in terms of environmental issues. The possibility of engaging more with Taiwan was also mentioned particularly in respect to the concept of devolution. It was also noted that the new President elect, Donald Trump may be more willing to take on China. China's counter-terrorism laws were also highlighted as areas of concern.

Tavish Scott MSP asked Mr. Baker what influence Confucius institutes had at Universities. Both Norman Baker and Martin Mills answered. Norman Baker emphasized that Confucius Institutes bring their own texts and monographs which potentially contain bias. Martin Mills agreed but indicated the influence of Confucius Institutes depend entirely upon the individual staff at relevant institutions working with them.

Mr. Baker then showed a short documentary film produced from Daramsala entitled "We Stand in Solidarity with Larung Gar" (available on YouTube) which depicts the deportation of nuns from Larung Gar monastery, the consequent suicide of some nuns, demolition of houses and nuns forced participation in Patriotic Education from the PRC. Norman Baker then noted that the Chinese Constitution in theory allows

for certain religious freedoms, thus much of the demolitions and deportations were conducted under 'health and safety' regulations.

Appreciative applause was given to Norman Baker, with thanks from the Chair.

Matter Arising

1d).Group Publicity and Press Release Protocols

The Secretary asked if the group agreed to build up the CPG on Tibet's website to include materials such as reports from the Tibet Society, ICT and Tibet Daily amongst others. All agreed.

4. AOCB

David Hudson raised the possibility of extending his unofficial invitation, to an official invitation to the Sikyong to visit the CPG on Tibet within the year.

Tashi commented upon the feeling of urgent need among Tibetan communities to preserve the Tibetan language particularly among the younger generations, and informed the group of his initiative to launch an online Tibetan language essay competition for under ten year olds. So far, Tashi has received over 170 essayists with the winner being the one who receives the most 'likes' via Facebook. Tashi also informed the group of a second project idea regarding funding for Higher education for Tibetan's who themselves lack the necessary funds. The aims being to raise awareness and finances for Tibetans to gain entry to higher education. Tashi is asking for help in publicity, support, information and finances. Options were discussed in this last regard.

The next meeting was confirmed to take place on 19th April 2017 at 6pm.

The meeting closed at 8pm with many group members retiring to the Kilderkin for refreshments.