

SCOTTISH CROSS PARTY GROUP ON TIBET (CPG)
MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 9TH MAY 2018 AT 6:00 PM

Attendees:

Linda Fabiani MSP (Chair)	Sir Maxwell MacLeod of Fuinary
Ross Greer MSP	Dalia Ossami Schimmell
Richard Lyle MSP	Dr Callum Pearce
Christina McKelvie MSP	Professor David W. Purdie
David Lloyd Hudson (Treasurer)	Sarah Schroeder
Dr Martin Mills (Secretary)	Svenja Sender
Sarah Al-Mutoteh	Alyn Smith MEP
Oskar Bengtsson	Victor Spence
Jenni Campbell	Tashi Thondup
Chonpel Tsering	Iain Thom
Roger Eames	
Linda Hendry	

1. Welcome to Mr Chonpel Tsering, Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Linda Fabiani welcomed Chonpel Tsering to the CPG and invited him to say a few words. CT thanked the CPG for their support, and announced his intention to attend CPG meetings twice a year in the future. He noted that the Central Tibetan Administration has declared 31/03/2018 - 30/03/2019 as a year of thanks/gratitude, to mark the 60th anniversary of the 14th Dalai Lama's exile to India. There are plans for events in London, and he suggested organising something in Edinburgh as well. Roger Eames asked about plans for a 10th March event in 2019; while CT said that he hoped there would be something to mark this occasion, this should not be seen as part of the year of thanks.

This was followed by discussions regarding the possibility of Sikyong Lobsang Sangay visiting the Scottish Parliament. CT noted that the Sikyong would need an open invitation to attend, and would most likely want to combine this with visits to other groups in Europe. CT also suggested that the CPG might consider sending a joint invitation with the Westminster All-Party Parliamentary Group for Tibet.

Maxwell MacLeod said that he and others would soon be travelling to Dharamsala, and asked Chonpel Tsering what they could do to contribute to Tibetan relations with China. CT noted that Tibetans have tried to accommodate discussion, but that officials of the People's Republic of China have been much less open to dialogue, and that the situation within mainland China has recently become much more restrictive, with even Han Chinese intellectuals subject to repressive measures. In such a climate, CT emphasised the importance of supporting Tibetan linguistic and cultural rights as expressed through Tibetan language teaching and the continued ability of Tibetans to practise their religion freely.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 14/03/18 were approved.

4. Matters arising

It was noted that the briefing paper *Mass Relocations and Resettlement on the Tibetan Plateau*, submitted to the Foreign Affairs Committee's inquiry on China and the international rules-based system, has now been accepted by the inquiry and will be incorporated into their

report. This contribution was the only written evidence the inquiry received, and the Secretary is awaiting the inquiry's analysis of the evidence it contains.

5. Tibet News update

A Tibet news digest for the period March-May 2018 was circulated. Discussion focused on two points:

- As demonstrated by stories on a Tibetan self-immolation in Sichuan province¹ and an attempt to petition the People's Supreme Court of China regarding the lack of Tibetan language in local courts², Tibetans in China are increasingly using forms of internal legal petition in their relations with governmental institutions: Chinese political structures allow complaints about provincial institutions to be made to central government.
- The United States Senate's unanimous resolution to commemorate a 'Tibetan Rights Day' on 10th March³, and the effect this would have on official US attitudes towards Tibet. Chonpel Tsering emphasised that any statement from the US Senate sends a strong message to China: as a unanimous resolution, this makes a clear point and should be seen as an important gesture whether or not it impacts the position of President Trump. CT also noted that there is no equivalent gesture possible in British parliamentary democracy, with the possible exception of an early day motion.

6. Essay Writing Prize update

Tashi Thondup updated the CPG on the progress of his Tibetan Language and Essay Competition. Following Chonpel Tsering's earlier comments, he emphasised the importance of promoting Tibetan language teaching and suggested that ensuring the survival of their language and traditions is the one thing exiled Tibetans can do to resist Chinese attempts to eradicate Tibetan culture. Among refugees, the Tibetan language has become increasingly mixed with Hindi, Nepali and English, leading to arguments on social media about speech and identity. Tashi sees the competition as a way of promoting Tibetan language skills among young people through informal education, creativity and the clear incentive provided by the prize money. In its first year the competition involved 7 schools, offering a first prize of c. £150, a second prize of c. £100 and a third prize of £50 in each category (i.e. for both written essays and spoken-word entries) out of total prize money of £600; in its second year it involved 9 schools. Tashi has personally visited 6-7 participating schools in India this year, and the competition will offer total prize money of £1200 divided between 9 winners in each category. Entries are uploaded to Facebook, and winners are decided on the basis of the number of likes they receive on the platform. Tashi himself provided only £200 of the prize money this year, with much of the rest gathered through crowdfunding. He especially thanked Jackie Fordyce for her efforts in supporting the competition, noting that she has spent around £700-800 on the competition herself. Tashi hopes to broaden the competition to cover Tibetan communities worldwide, not just schools; he emphasised that this is a people's movement, and that he is there only as a facilitator.

It was explained that, should Tibetan schools in Nepal wish to get involved with the competition, the first point of contact should be through email or Facebook: search for Worldwide Tibetan Language and Essay Competition. The competition has a page on the social media platform under the name འཛམ་གླིང་བོད་ཀྱི་བྱིས་པའི་རྩོམ་ཡིག་འགྲན་བསྐྱུས། (*zamling bhoekyi jipey tsomyig*)

¹ <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/tibetan-dies-in-self-immolation-in-sichuans-ngaba-county-03072018112200.html>

² <https://freetibet.org/news-media/na/tibetan%E2%80%99s-hit-out-against-lack-tibetan-language-local-courts>

³ <https://freetibet.org/news-media/na/us-senate-recognises-tibetan-rights-day>

drendur: Worldwide Tibetan Children's Essay Competition).⁴ Tashi also plans to send out a circular about the competition via email.

The Chair, the Secretary and Chonpel Tsering offered the CPG's congratulations to Tashi on the resounding success of the competition.

7. Next meeting

The next meeting of the CPG will be held in September, after the summer recess. Exact date TBC.

8. AOCB

David Lloyd Hudson spoke of the importance of restarting student Tibet societies in Edinburgh and Aberdeen, though it was noted that this would depend on students taking the initiative themselves. DLH also suggested organising more regular meetings between the members of the CPG, and Chonpel Tsering suggested arranging informal social meetings on the Dalai Lama's birthday (6th July), Human Rights Day (10th December) and the anniversary of the 10th March Tibetan uprising.

Maxwell MacLeod explained that he, David Purdie and Alexander McCall Smith had been involved in a project concerning the impact of Walter Scott's work on the transformation of the idea of Scotland, and asked if there were any points of connection with the situation of Tibetan refugees. The Secretary suggested organising a talk on modern Tibetan writing, and Chonpel Tsering suggested inviting Lama Jabb from the University of Oxford to speak in Edinburgh on modern Tibetan political writers. Linda Fabiani suggested also inviting members of the Scottish branch of PEN international.

Tashi Thondup said he hoped to see the establishment of a Tibetan community group in Edinburgh, and asked Chonpel Tsering if he would help initiate this. CT said that he would be happy to send an email lending his support for this, but that any organisation should be a ground-up effort begun through local social events. He also noted that it might be too soon for a formal community group in Edinburgh.

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/ZAMLINGBHOEKYIJIPEYTSOMYIGDRENDUR/>