

Cross-Party Group on Tibet

Thursday 7 October 2021, 6:50pm

Minute

Present

MSPs

Ross Greer MSP, Mercedes Villalba MSP

Invited guests

Sonam Tsering Frasi (Office of Tibet), Tsering Tsomo (Office of Tibet)

Non-MSP Group Members

Eleanor Byrne-Rosengren, Victor Spence, Linda Hendry, Mike Lean, Tenzin Choekyi, John Jones, Jill Sudbury, Mark Watson, Roger Eames, Ron Scrimgeour, Martin Mills

Apologies

Apologies were received from Collette Stevenson MSP, Rhoda Grant MSP, Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP and Jenni Campbell.

1. Welcome

RG welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Approval of Minutes – 17 March 2021

Minutes of the March meeting were proposed by MM, seconded by LF and approved.

3. Matters Arising

LH asked if the group thought that representatives from Samye Ling or the Tibetan community should be invited to attend the CPG. EBR advised the group that Reka Gawa had hoped to attend but the upsurge in business had kept her busy at the café following the recent publicity. Samye Ling and other Tibetans were welcome to join the CPG. EBR noted that some Tibetans were very cautious about political activity – or activity that could be viewed as political – and preferred to maintain a low profile.

4. COP 26

COP 26 is taking place in Glasgow between Sunday 31 October and Friday 12 November 2021.

A number of Tibetans and representatives of Tibetans organisations will be coming to Glasgow to participate in various ways. The events which have been planned so far include:

- 4 November: A panel discussion featuring MM, together with Dr Tobias Bolch, a glaciologist from St Andrew's University, Dr Lobsang Yangtso from the International Tibet Network and Dechen Palmo from the Tibet Policy Institute.
- 6 November: A climate march taking place as part of the Global Day of Action for Climate Justice. This is being organised by the COP 26 Coalition and a slot has been allocated at the rally for a Tibetan activist to speak.
- 7 November: A second panel discussion featuring TC and MV, together with Pema Doma from Students for a Free Tibet and Golog Jigme (torture survivor and filmmaker).

EBR will circulate additional details as they are confirmed.

5. Winter Olympics

EBR noted that this will be the next main focal point for the Tibet movement after COP 26. JJ gave an update on the campaign to boycott the Winter Olympics, which are scheduled to be held in China in 2022. A boycott is already supported by politicians from the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties in the UK as well as the Czech senate, and US politicians Nancy Pelosi and Mitt Romney. EBR reminded the group that the debate held in Westminster in July 2021 ended with a vote in favour of a boycott.

6. Update on Key Issues in Tibet

TC from Tibet Watch gave a detailed briefing on recent events in Tibet.

- Footage has emerged from occupied Tibet of a giant projection onto the former home of the exiled Dalai Lama by the Chinese Communist Party, celebrating the 100th anniversary of the CCP's establishment ahead of celebrations on 1 July. This has caused much distress to the Tibetan people.
- Self-immolations continue to take place.
- Gold mining employs at least 200 Tibetans and there is limited health and safety protection for them in the chemical extraction of this valuable metal.
- Monasteries and schools are the traditional centres for teaching both the written and spoken forms of the main Tibetan languages. Tibetan language teaching has been severely suppressed recently and teachers have been arrested and have been removed from office.

- Tibetans living in the border areas of Nepal have been asked to provide details of expat Tibetans and are encouraged to ask them to return to their homeland.

JJ added further details on these points, including teachers of the Tibetan language being arrested for “separatism”. Free Tibet is running a campaign to highlight this serious undermining of Tibetan culture. To coincide with the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party, politically correct history books have been issued. Non-approved history books have been withdrawn.

In response to a question about keeping the language alive in exile, TC said that parents were now taking more responsibility for teaching the Tibetan languages to their children during home schooling sessions and through Sunday schools. Recordings of the spoken word were being made to help with this. ML advised the group that a language teaching methodology called Ulpan may be useful for Tibetan parents in this situation. The Ulpan system was designed to teach adult immigrants to Israel the basic language skills of conversation in Hebrew. It has also been used to teach Gaelic.

7. Future Plan

EBR noted the group’s interest in language and indicated that Tibet Action is currently campaigning on this issue. She suggested this might be something the CPG could work on in the future and encouraged people to put forward additional suggestions for future areas of work/focus.

SF advised the CPG that an exhibition of photographs of HH the Dalai Lama was being put together and asked if VS had any that he could contribute from previous visits to Scotland.

SF asked if MM was going to update his climate report. SF had had a number of copies of this unique reference material printed and bound for distribution to both UK and European think tanks and embassies. MM agreed to make his data available and to update the summary by next spring.

8. Next Meeting

This will be arranged once the registration process has been completed.

Meeting ended 7:30 pm