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HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

ISSUE

The human rights situation in China continues to be a matter of serious concern to the Canadian government, and a factor in bilateral relations.

BACKGROUND

International concern over respect for human rights increased dramatically as a result of the events of Tiananmen in June 1989. Since that time, the Chinese government has made some effort to counter internal discontent and Western criticism of the human rights situation in China, as evidenced by the release in November 1991 by the Chinese State Council of a white paper on human rights in China. Nevertheless, the Chinese government's record on human rights is clearly unsatisfactory, especially regarding political repression, limitations on freedoms of speech and assembly, and the administration of justice.

Canada's concerns focus in particular on the treatment of individuals for non-violent expression of political or religious views, the treatment of detainees, prison conditions and trial procedures. Officials at the Canadian Embassy in Beijing have on several occasions formally requested access to trials of dissidents, notably during the trials of those associated with the events at Tiananmen Square of June 1989. These requests were always refused.

Canadian concerns about human rights in Tibet have also been regularly raised with Chinese authorities at all levels. In addition, cases of specific dissidents have been raised with the Chinese authorities, for example by a delegation of Canadian parliamentarians in November 1990, and by Canadian Embassy officials during a visits to Tibet in November 1991 and August 1992.

CANADIAN POSITION

Canada has supported multilateral initiatives calling for greater respect for human rights in China. In September 1989, the UN Subcommittee on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, encouraged by Canada, adopted a resolution asking the UN Secretary-General to report on the human rights situation in China in 1990. This report was submitted in January 1991. In March 1991, Canada co-sponsored a resolution before the UN Commission on Human Rights calling for greater respect for human rights in China. Although that resolution was narrowly defeated, Canada reiterated its concern on the human rights situation in China, including Tibet, in its statement at the Commission. At the 1992 session of the Commission, Canada co-sponsored a resolution condemning China's human rights practices, but this was again defeated.

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