

International Humanist and Ethical Union

UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL: 11th Session (2 – 19 June 2009)

Speaker: IHEU Representative, Catherine Buchs: ~~Monday 8~~ ^{Tues} ⁹ June 2009

Item 4: Matters requiring the attention of the Council

Human Rights in China

Thank you, Mr President

[We wish to draw attention to some major obstacles to human rights in the People's Republic of China, 20 years after the Tiananmen Square massacre of 4 June 1989. Sadly, since those tragic events, changes in human rights and criminal law legislation have not dealt with major structural issues that continue to cause concern. We regret that our written statement to the 11th session of the council on this subject has not yet been published].

Mr President, China continues to violate the human rights of its people in a number of key respects.

First, China has adopted an interpretation of human rights which fails to conform to international standards including the UDHR and ICCPR. The Constitution of the People's Republic of China states that "The State respects and preserves human rights."¹ However, it also defends the notion of a "harmonious society" which protects "Asian values" – in other words, a society where the welfare of the collective takes precedence over the rights of the individual.² [Such a definition stands in stark contrast to the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.]

Our second point relates to Tibet [where an estimated quarter of a million Chinese troops remain stationed, and whose primary objective appears to be to crush any manifestations of dissent or criticism of the Beijing regime]. Since Tibetans are not given access to the same rights and freedoms as their Chinese neighbours, either in economic terms or in terms of freedom of speech, their situation represents a major contravention of Article 2 of the UDHR.

The third issue relates to capital punishment. China executes more people each year than all other states combined.³ Approximately 68 crimes are punishable by death, [including non-violent crimes such as tax fraud and embezzlement.⁴ Executions are effected by hanging, lethal injection or a shot in the back of the head.] China does not safeguard the "right to life, liberty and security of person" enshrined in Article 3 of the UDHR.⁵

Our fourth point is this. According to Article 35 of the Chinese Constitution, Chinese citizens enjoy freedom of speech and freedom of the press⁶. Yet [pervasive and extremely effective Government censorship denies Chinese citizens these freedoms.] China ranks 167 out of the 173 states listed in the 2008 World Press Freedom Index [compiled by Reporters Without Borders.⁷] Restrictions of freedom of expression in China are in clear breach of Article 19 of the ICCPR.

Mr President, we respectfully ask the People's Republic of China to urgently consider, 20 years after Tiananmen Square, whether the time has now come to ratify the ICCPR, and to bring its concept of human rights into line with international standards.

Thank you sir.

¹ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn?pagename=article&contentId=A57447-2004Mar14>

² <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=9070&size=A>

³ <http://www.amnesty.ie/amnesty/live/irish/action/article.asp?id=18423&page=18378>

⁴ http://www.thechinadebate.org/en/?page_id=7

⁵ <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml>

⁶ <http://www.cecc.gov/pages/virtualAcad/exp/>

⁷ http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=29031