

12.4 Motion regarding the treatment of Uyghur Muslims in China and the situation in Hong Kong

Proposer: Councillor Rabina Khan

Seconder: Councillor Peter Golds

This Council notes:

1. The purchase of the Royal Mint site in Tower Hamlets for the new People's Republic of China London embassy building.
2. The number of residents living in Tower Hamlets from the People's Republic of China including Hong Kong residents. In addition the number of businesses from that country active and investing in Tower Hamlets.
3. The long history dating back to before the 1880's of the Chinese community in Tower Hamlets and that many people from the region are now citizens of the United Kingdom.
4. The historic ties between China, Hong Kong and Tower Hamlets due to the trade between these two countries, whether tea shipped into the docks or from the trading desks of the Hong Kong & Shanghai Banking Corporation (now HSBC) whose global headquarters are in Tower Hamlets.

This Council is concerned that:

5. In Xinjiang, there is compelling evidence including from the Chinese authorities' own documents of systematic human rights violations.
6. The reports of arbitrary detention, widespread surveillance and restrictions, particularly targeting Uyghurs and other minorities in Xinjiang have been widely shared in Tower Hamlets.
7. That the culture and religion of minorities have been severely restricted, and that the UK government has seen credible reports of forced labour and forced birth control.
8. That up to 1.8 million people have been detained without trial.
9. These deep concerns have been reinforced by additional information now in the public domain.
10. In Hong Kong, Beijing's imposition of the National Security Law is a serious breach of the legally binding Sino-British Joint Declaration.
11. It violates Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy and directly threatens rights and freedoms.
12. The National Security Law is being implemented with the apparent intention to eliminate dissent. It allows prosecution of certain cases in mainland China, a jurisdiction where defendants are often held for long periods without charge or access to legal counsel, and where we have concerns about judicial independence, due process, and reports of torture.
13. The Joint Declaration, a legally binding treaty, registered with the United Nations, sets out that Hong Kong is guaranteed a high degree of autonomy and rights and freedoms, including those of the person, of the press, of assembly, and of association and that the ICCPR and ICESCR shall remain in force. These rights are also guaranteed in the basic law for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.
14. Making such a law without the direct participation of Hong Kong's people, legislature or judiciary of Hong Kong undermines 'One Country, Two Systems'.

This Council Believes:

15. That when the Embassy does move to Tower Hamlets that the embassy staff will be able to see how people with different nationalities, backgrounds, religions and ethnicities can work closely together in harmony and that a person's religion is not a threat to be removed by violating their human rights and trying to suppress their identity as we fear the Chinese government is trying to do now in Xinjiang.
16. That as a democratically elected body in a rules-based society we fundamentally believe that governments need to respect all of their citizens, that people need to be treated equally, that suppressing dissent through force is counter-productive and that international treaties should be respected.
17. That both of these stands are in the long-term interests of all of the citizens of China. Britain has made mistakes in the past in how it has dealt with other countries and peoples, we hope that the People's Republic of China won't repeat some of those same mistakes in the 21st century.

This Council Resolves:

18. To write to the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China based in the United Kingdom to welcome the Embassy and its staff moving to Tower Hamlets. But that as new neighbours and friends we have to make clear where our own standards and principles apply. We believe that it is in the People's Republic of China's own interest to:
 - a. Cease its human rights' abuses against the Uyghur Muslims and all other detainees, and to urge China to implement the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination's recommendations in Xinjiang, and allow the United Nations to monitor its implementation.
 - b. We urge the Chinese and Hong Kong Governments to reconsider the imposition of National Security Law legislation and to engage Hong Kong's people, institutions and judiciary to prevent further erosion of the rights and freedoms that the people of Hong Kong have enjoyed for many years.
19. That we in Tower Hamlets, welcome residents of Hong Kong who wish to take advantage of their now increased ability to move to the United Kingdom (even if more could be done). That the Borough has a long and proud history of being the first home in the UK for many people fleeing persecution in their original countries. And that those earlier arrivals are now British citizens.
20. To write to the UK Foreign Secretary, The Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP, to ask him to raise the situation of prisoners in China in all his interactions with his Chinese counterparts, and urge China to uphold its international human rights' obligations in Xinjiang in the face of credible evidence of ongoing human rights' violations against Uyghur Muslims.