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P R E S S R E L E A S E

EU Special Representative for Human Rights visits China

The EU Special Representative for Human Rights, Mr Stavros Lambrinidis, paid an official visit to China from 9-18 September 2013. Hosted by the Chinese Ministry for Foreign Affairs, who facilitated meetings throughout the visit, the mission included five-days in the ethnic Tibetan areas of Qinghai Province and the Tibet Autonomous Region.

The visit provided opportunities for the EU and China to engage in in-depth discussions on human rights at a senior level, on the basis of serious concerns. The two sides also discussed ways of promoting enhanced dialogue and results-oriented cooperation on human rights.

"During my visit the Chinese authorities allowed for meetings and open discussions with a broad range of stakeholders. I had the opportunity to be informed of progress on a number of important economic and social fronts, including poverty eradication and education. At the same time, I noted worrying trends in key areas of human rights concern, including the heightened monitoring and restrictions placed on freedom of expression on- and off-line, as well as the persecution, arrest, and detention of people for peacefully expressing their views or legally exercising their professional duties. Throughout my visit, I underlined the EU's readiness to continue to work with China in promoting respective adherence to international human rights obligations and standards," said EUSR Lambrinidis at the end of his visit.

EUSR Lambrinidis' main counterpart during the visit was Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Mr Li Baodong. In Beijing, the EUSR also held high-level meetings with Mr Qiangba Puncog, Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress; Mr Gao Jinghong, full-time member of the Judicial Committee of the Supreme People's Court; Ms Cui Yuying, Deputy Director of the State Council Information Office; Mr Chen Gaihu, Vice Minister of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission; and Mr Jiang Jianyong, Deputy Director of the State Administration of Religious Affairs. EUSR Lambrinidis also visited Yangcheng Prison outside Beijing.

FOR FURTHER DETAILS:

Michael Mann +32 498 999 780 - +32 2 584 9780- Michael.Mann@eeas.europa.eu [@EUHighRepSpox](https://twitter.com/EUHighRepSpox)
Maja Kocijancic +32 498 984 425 - +32 2 298 65 70 - Maja.Kocijancic@ec.europa.eu [@AshtonSpox](https://twitter.com/AshtonSpox) Maja

Sebastien Brabant +32 460 75 09 98 - Sebastien.Brabant@ec.europa.eu

Eamonn Prendergast +32 460 75 32 93 - Eamonn.Prendergast@ec.europa.eu

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Among issues discussed were China's commitments under the UN's Universal Periodic Review, including on early ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; legal reform, including the new Criminal Procedure Code and its application and the Re-education through Labour system; the human rights situation in minority areas, including Tibet and Xinjiang; latest restrictions on the freedoms of expression, information, and association; freedom of religion and belief; death penalty reform; progress on economic and social rights; the universality of human rights and the role of civil society and protection against arbitrary harassment, arrests, and detentions.

In Beijing, the EUSR also chaired the first ever EU-China Roundtable on Business and Human Rights, which gathered over 50 participants from EU and Chinese authorities, business, academia and other stakeholders, to discuss the implementation of the UN's Strategic Framework and Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, exchange best practices, and explore possible future cooperation between China and the EU in this field. Mr Lambrinidis also addressed the Central Party School and delivered a lecture to law and human rights Masters students at the China University of Politics and Law. He also met with a broad cross-section of civil society, including academics, lawyers, journalists, artists, bloggers and human right defenders.

In Qinghai Province and the Tibet Autonomous Region, EUSR Lambrinidis held official talks with the Party Secretary of TAR, Mr Chen Quanguo; the Chairman of TAR, Mr Lobsang Gyaltsen; the Party Secretary of Lhasa, Mr Qi Zhala; and the Vice-Governor of Qinghai, Mr Wang Xiao, as well as with several other party and government officials. He was also taken to see herdsmen in an agricultural cooperative, a newly built village for resettled nomads, met with professors and students at Tibet University and editors of the Tibet Daily, and visited the Potala Palace and Jokhang and Sera Monasteries in Lhasa, where he met with monks and members of Monastery Management Committees. Issues discussed included security, stability and due process of law, including in the context of self-immolations; the free exercise of religion and expression; sustainable development challenges and urbanization; the livelihood of ex-nomads; the protection of the environment; and the preservation of cultural identity and heritage, including through bilingual education.

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