



MEDIA RELEASE

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Australia must stand up to China on Tibet as Zhao Leji visits, NOT “agree where they can and disagree when they must”

The Australia Tibet Council is calling on the Australian Government to stand up for Tibet and human rights during the visit of senior Chinese Communist Party official Zhao Leji, Chairman of the National People’s Congress.

Zhao’s visit comes at a time when the Chinese Government is intensifying its repression in Tibet, via the forced separation of 1 million Tibetan children from their families into Chinese state-run institutions where they are denied their rights to speak Tibetan, practice Tibetan Buddhism and be raised in Tibetan culture.

This is an ongoing crisis that echoes the recognised historical injustice of Australia’s own Stolen Generations. Yet Australia appears increasingly eager to overlook these abuses in the name of “stabilising the relationship with China.”

This year, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese travelled to Beijing, and Zhao’s visit signals further efforts to court China.

ATC believes this approach is profoundly insensitive during the **Year of Compassion**, declared to celebrate His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s 90th birthday and honour his lifetime of dedication to peace and non-violence. "While the world honours the Dalai Lama’s lifetime legacy of non-violence, peace and compassion, Australia is rolling out the red carpet for a senior architect of the Government responsible for the oppressive policies harming Tibetans", said Dr Zoë Bedford, Executive Officer of the Australia Tibet Council.

"The Albanese Government must not treat Tibet as a secondary issue or a mere point of disagreement—it is an urgent human rights crisis affecting the life and freedom of millions of Tibetans".

Tibet remains one of the least free regions on earth. While under occupation and because of Zhao Leji’s leadership roles within China’s security and disciplinary apparatus, Tibetans have faced extreme surveillance, cultural erasure, and punishment for even peaceful cultural or religious expression. More than a million Tibetan children have been separated from their families and placed in Chinese Communist Party, colonial-style boarding schools designed to eradicate their language and identity.

ATC is urging the Australian Government to: use Zhao’s visit to take a strong, public stance. This includes calling on the Chinese Government to resume negotiations with the Dalai Lama’s representatives to pursue a peaceful, long-term resolution to the open, ongoing and unresolved international conflict between China and Tibet. It is imperative that Tibet is not forgotten, and that governments around the world take a more active stance on China to resolve the China Tibet conflict during the Dalai Lama’s lifetime.

"The Dalai Lama is 90 years old. He has been openly seeking a long lasting peaceful negotiated solution with China since China invaded and occupied Tibet in 1959" says Dr Zoë Bedford.

"It is a failing of the Chinese Communist Party to not take the olive branch extended by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Australia should understand the urgency and press China to return to negotiations with the Dalai Lama while they still can".

"Australia must stand up for the fundamental rights of the Tibetan people. Diplomacy should not require silence, and economic pragmatism must never come at the expense of human dignity and human rights for Tibet."

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ABOUT AUSTRALIA TIBET COUNCIL

Australia Tibet Council campaigns for the human rights and democratic freedoms of the Tibetan people. Founded in 1988, ATC works with Tibetan communities, advocates, and supporters across Australia to ensure the international community does not look away from the ongoing crisis in Tibet.

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Australia Tibet Council campaigns for the freedom and human rights of Tibetans. We are a not-for-profit organisation, funded by members across Australia.

In the spirit of reconciliation, Australia Tibet Council acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

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