



THE HON STEPHEN SMITH MP

MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
PARLIAMENT HOUSE
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Mrs Julia Irwin MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

18 NOV 2009

Julia

Dear Mrs Irwin

Thank you for your letter of 29 October 2009 referring a petition submitted for the consideration of the Standing Committee on Petitions regarding the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners in China. In accordance with Standing Order 209(b), my response is as follows.

The Australian Government has taken a strong and consistent approach to engaging the Chinese Government on human rights, including in relation to Falun Gong Practitioners. The Australian Government continues to engage China on human rights, including persecution of Falun Gong practitioners through the Australia-China Human Rights Dialogue, the most recent round of which took place in Canberra in February 2009. The next round of the Human Rights Dialogue will take place in China in 2010.

The Government has made the point to China that it is important to guarantee both freedom of belief and freedom of religious activity without state interference. The Government has also expressed concern about reports that the Chinese authorities continue to suppress religious activities which they deem to be outside the scope of the state-controlled religious system. This would appear to be inconsistent with the right of freedom of belief, including the right to observe, worship, practice and teach in accordance with that belief. The Australian Government has urged China to protect that right, and will continue to do so.

Yours sincerely

Best Wishes

Stephen Smith