

# China rights abuses mock human rights plan

## As Canada's trade minister visits China, activists, persecuted groups urge prisoners' release, rights for human rights defenders

By CINDY CHAN  
Epoch Times Staff

Amid Canada's trade mission to China during which Trade Minister Stockwell Day had said that human rights would be discussed, the Chinese regime has issued a human rights action plan.

But Canadian activists say they're looking for prisoners' release and other concrete progress rather than promises on paper.

A key area for progress, they said, would be for the regime to stop persecuting human rights defenders themselves, such as rights lawyers.

On April 13, the day the regime launched the plan, Chengdu public officials reportedly violently beat Beijing lawyer Cheng Hai on his way to see the mother of an imprisoned Falun Gong practitioner he is defending.

Dermot Travis, executive director of the Canada Tibet Committee, said the new plan "could be called whitewashing."

"We've seen in the past from China a tendency to put forward great words that they fail miserably at living up to. We certainly saw this with the commitments that they made to the International Olympic Committee in order to win the Olympic Games in 2008."

Instead of fulfilling its promise to improve human rights, media

and rights organizations worldwide reported deterioration in people's rights and freedoms ahead of the Beijing Olympics.

"We do have to raise concerns about the lack of civil and political rights focus in the document," said Lindsay Mossman, Amnesty International Canada's campaigner with responsibility for human rights in China.

"We'd like to see, for example, reforms ensured that human rights activists are not detained arbitrarily, that they're not harassed, and certainly the release of prisoners of conscience. Those are the kinds of things that should be outlined in the plan with concrete targets as have been set out for some of the other areas."

The 54-page two-year national action plan emphasized priority on "rights to subsistence and development," setting out targets in areas such as employment, housing, social security, healthcare, and education.

Uyghur Canadian Society President Rukiya Turdush expressed hope for the people of China but "hopelessness" for the Uyghurs of the Xinjiang region in northwestern China. She said she doesn't believe the plan will be implemented in Xinjiang.

Former Secretary of State (Asia-Pacific) David Kilgour pointed to the torture of human rights lawyer



Former MP David Kilgour at a press conference last week in support of Falun Gong practitioners who want Trade Minister Stockwell Day to urge the Chinese regime to free their relatives jailed for practicing Falun Gong. The Falun Dafa Association of Canada has informed Mr. Day of 10 jailed practitioners with close family ties in Canada. (SAMIRA BOUAOU/THE EPOCH TIMES)

and Nobel Peace Prize nominee Gao Zhisheng.

Mr. Gao was tortured for more than 50 days in 2007 after writing an open letter to the U.S. Congress on the state of human rights in China in the run-up to the Beijing Olympics. The torturers shocked him with electric batons all over his body, including his mouth and genitals, and also pierced his genitals with toothpicks.

Mr. Gao was again taken from his home by more than ten security agents on February 4. His current whereabouts are unknown.

**Communist party and human rights "totally opposed"**

Mr. Kilgour said that as long as the communist party rules in China, there will not be respect for human rights and freedoms.

"Since 1949 the party has been doing its utmost to destroy all of those [rights and freedoms]—what we take for granted in rule-of-law countries. The two are totally opposed."

Mr. Kilgour and Winnipeg-based international human rights lawyer David Matas published a report in 2006-2007 documenting evidence of Chinese state-sanctioned organ harvesting from imprisoned Falun

Gong practitioners. Despite multiple requests by United Nations special rapporteurs, the regime continues to deny illicit organ harvesting and refuses independent investigations in the country.

Mr. Travis sees nothing "standing out" in the action plan about the rights to a fair or open trial and the rights to legal counsel, religious freedom, and peaceful assembly.

Just last week two Tibetans were sentenced to death for their alleged roles in last year's uprising, he said.

"Last year, when a number of Chinese lawyers volunteered to defend Tibetans from charges arising from the uprising, it became abundantly clear that the government of China would not permit them to defend the Tibetans and they had to withdraw from the cases," he said.

China has about 340 labour camps where an estimated 250,000 prisoners perform forced labour in "terrible conditions, half of whom are estimated to be Falun Gong practitioners," said Mr. Kilgour.

"You cannot put out a 50-page statement like that and have any credibility if you're going to keep these forced labour camps open. Those camps are perhaps the most blatant example of the fact there is no rule of law in China, because you can be sent to these camps without any trial or any proceeding for up to four years."

Mr. Day is in China from April 10 to 17. The trade mission has so far seen the launch of science and technology research initiatives, construction contracts, reconstruction plans in the earthquake-devastated region of Sichuan, and new Canadian trade offices.

Mr. Travis said that while Mr. Day has indicated plans to address human rights issues in China, "what we're also looking for is actually to see progress on these issues."

## Volunteers do it for free

By JOAN DELANEY  
Epoch Times Staff

They can be found everywhere from hospitals, food banks, and museums to your local community garden. They are volunteers—those who donate their time, energy and talents to others without being motivated by financial or material gain.

National Volunteer Week, running from April 19 - 25, pays tribute to the 12 million Canadians who work to better the lives of others—an altruistic activity that at the same time contributes to the economy.

And that contribution is no paltry amount. With the support of volunteers, Canada's 161,000 charities and nonprofits contribute \$112 billion in revenue to the GDP—more than the entire manufacturing industry, according to Volunteer Canada.

In addition, the voluntary sector's 12 million volunteers, giving collectively two billion hours of their time, make up a considerable portion of the country's labour force. There are over 80,000 organizations with no paid staff at all that rely solely on the contributions of volunteers.

Ruth MacKenzie, president of Volunteer Canada, a national nonprofit organization, says that in the current economic downturn, the voluntary sector should be looked

at by the government as an opportunity to stimulate the economy.

"Our federal government can do more for this sector, not to show generosity or compassion, but to provide opportunities for driving Canada's national economy in the right direction as part of an effective economic stimulus," Mackenzie said in an article circulated to media in January.

MacKenzie said that with a recession well under way, civil society and service organizations will be increasingly called upon to support the needs of people in communities across the country.

However, in tough economic times, the common reaction of governments and corporations is to reduce local community investment and to solely consider the role of the corporate sector as a source of economic stimulus.

"Now more than ever the federal government needs to recognize volunteerism as part of the social and economic infrastructure of this country," Mackenzie said.

"To do so requires shedding the common perception that volunteerism just happens, when in fact promoting, recruiting, training, engaging and recognizing the efforts of volunteers requires support and expertise that is often unrecognized or overlooked and definitely under-resourced."

An investment in volunteerism, said MacKenzie, will ensure that

the efforts and skills of Canada's volunteers will go right back into communities.

This in turn will provide skills training for Canadians, while helping the government achieve goals such as creating environmentally sustainable communities, safe neighbourhoods, and efficient healthcare and education systems.

South of the border, President Barack Obama has promised a volunteer fund as part of the Serve America Act. Under the Act, the government would support work such as tutoring students in poverty-stricken neighbourhoods, cleaning up polluted rivers and lakes, and training the unemployed with job-related and job-hunting skills.

"This fund will help organizations of all sizes to increase their capacity to mobilize volunteers while responding to increasing demands on their services. It is exactly the kind of leadership that we need in Canada," said MacKenzie.

To celebrate National Volunteer Week, Volunteer Canada is inviting organizations to submit photos and videos of their volunteers to its new website (volunteer.ca/nvw). The website currently features hundreds of photos and videos submitted by individuals and organizations from across the country.

## Students urge stronger action to end Darfur genocide

By CINDY CHAN  
Epoch Times Staff

OTTAWA—Canada must take stronger action to help end the genocide and deteriorating humanitarian crisis in war-torn Darfur in western Sudan, said activists who held an awareness-raising rally last week.

Students from University of Ottawa (UO) and Carleton University were joined by Sudanese-Canadian and other supporters at a rally on the UO campus, followed by a march to the Embassy of Sudan.

"In the last month [the crisis in Darfur] has gotten a lot worse," said Jonathan Laski, a UO student and former communications director of STAND Canada (Students Taking Action Now: Darfur).

First there was good news, Mr. Laski said. On March 4 the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant for Sudanese President Omar Hassan al-Bashir, indicting him for war crimes and crimes against humanity—including murder, rape, and torture—committed in Darfur since 2003.

The 65-year-old leader of Africa's largest country became the first sitting head of state ever indicted by the ICC.

But because Sudan does not recognize the ICC, Mr. Bashir retaliated by expelling over a dozen of the most experienced international aid agencies from the country.

These humanitarian NGOs had been providing food, water, medicine, healthcare, shelter, and other lifesaving assistance to the many internally displaced people (IDP) in Darfur and other parts of Sudan.

Among the groups were Oxfam, CARE, Save the Children, and Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), which received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1999.

"They know how to operate in such a large area with so many people. The number of people the Canadian government and the international community are saying are affected by those 13 groups is 1.1 million people," said Mr. Laski.

They are among the people "wandering in the deserts of Darfur or displaced in all parts of the globe in an attempt to escape from death at the hands of the Sudanese president," said Abdel Ghaffar Ahmed who spoke at the rally on behalf of the Sudanese Initiative-Ottawa.

In addition to Darfur, Sudan is struggling with a troubled peace agreement that ended the 22-year 1983 - 2005 north-south civil war. The conflict between the Muslim north and the mostly Christian and animist rebels in the south killed over 2 million people and displaced

more than 4 million people.

**'Now the picture is darker'**

The deadly conflict in Darfur began in 2003 when mostly non-Arab Sudanese rebelled against Mr. Bashir's Arab regime centred in Khartoum.

The rebel groups accused the regime of neglecting the drought-ridden region facing desertification and overpopulation. They also charged Khartoum with arming the Janjaweed, a militia mainly composed of nomadic Arab tribesmen, against African farmers and other inhabitants in Darfur.

Experts estimate that from 200,000 to 400,000 people have died since the uprising, and that as many as 2.5 to 2.7 million people have been driven from their homes. Meanwhile, the Sudanese government places the death toll at 10,000.

Neither efforts at ceasefires and peace talks nor the deployment of United Nations and African Union peacekeepers in the region have succeeded in stopping the violence.

"Now the picture is darker because within a month five workers had been kidnapped," said Mr. Ahmed.

On March 12 three aid workers, including Canadian nurse Laura Archer working for MSF, were held hostage for three days by unidentified militia before being released.

Ms. Archer returned to Canada on March 21, but two aid workers with France-based Aide Médicale Internationale were kidnapped on April 4 in Darfur, including one Canadian and one French citizen.

Ransoms were demanded, and Mr. Ahmed, like other observers, sees a link between these kidnappings and Mr. Bashir's anger and defiance toward the ICC indictment.

Even prior to the indictment, aid workers had been working under increasing insecurity, facing attack by the Sudanese Armed Forces, local militias, rebels, as well as bandits.

The arrival of the rainy season will make things even worse for the people, said Mr. Laski. "In two or three months, the transportation routes will be flooded, and getting new food, shelter, and aid to the IDP camps will become a lot more difficult, take more time, and take more money."

The camps also face the danger of running out of clean water and the threat of disease such as diarrhoea, meningitis, malaria, and cholera.

**Need for Canadian, international decisive action**

Stand Canada and other activ-

ists are urging the Canadian government to publicly condemn the government of Sudan and work closely with the international community to bring justice and aid to Darfur.

They want Prime Minister Stephen Harper to publicly state his government's support for the ICC's findings and to confirm that it will arrest Mr. Bashir if the opportunity arises and turn him over to the ICC.

Canada should also "appoint a high-level envoy for Sudan to provide constant, timely information on the fate of the Darfuri people and Canadian citizens providing aid in the region."

Finally, Canada, as co-chair of the Friends of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), should push for full deployment of this mission, the activists said.

The UNAMID was expected to be operating in full force in 2008 with 26,000 police and military personnel, but Mr. Laski said that to date only about 60 percent of the troops have been deployed.

In addition, Stand Canada is urging the Canadian government to provide more helicopters for the mission and consider supporting creation of a no-fly zone over Darfur.

In an op-ed in The Washington Post in March, former U.S. Air Force chief of staff General Merrill McPeak and Democratization Policy Council senior associate Kurt Bassuener suggested that taking away the Sudanese government's use of air power to terrorize its population would give the West enough leverage with Khartoum to negotiate entry of a stronger U.N. ground force.


However, imposing control over Sudanese airspace must be a decisive international effort involving NATO and European Union allies, they said.

Mr. Ahmed agreed that "it's necessary to send the message to the Sudanese government that the international community will not let the situation in Darfur get worse."

"As a member of the ICC, Canada has an obligation to help the ICC hold Bashir to account, to arrest, so he will be accountable to the charges against him," he added.

Mr. Laski emphasized the importance of pursuing justice in Darfur and allowing the aid groups to return in a timely fashion.

To do this, "publicity is important. We're trying to help Canadians understand this situation. When they hear the PM talking about how important the situation is, then a lot more [people] will become engaged," he said.



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