

MP defends free speech rights in Venezuela

Canada condemns Chavez regime's 'unacceptable' rebuke of Canadian concerns over suppression of democratic rights in Venezuela

By CINDY CHAN
Epoch Times Staff

OTTAWA—Peter Kent, Minister of State for the Americas, reiterated his concern on Sunday over dwindling democratic rights in Venezuela as he condemned the Latin American regime's "outrageous and unacceptable" rebuke of a statement he issued on Jan. 28.

Kent's statement expressed concern over President Hugo Chavez's order to suspend the licences of six television stations on Jan. 24. Among them was opposition channel RCTV, which is highly critical of Chavez's leftist government.

The minister also noted his regret that two students were killed during protests that followed the suspensions.

"These events are further evidence of a shrinking democratic space in Venezuela. Freedom of expression and access to information from a wide range of sources are fundamental elements of a healthy democracy," Kent said, urging Caracas to immediately restore the stations' transmissions.

In response, Roy Chaderton Matos, Venezuela's ambassador to the Organization of American States (OAS), on Feb. 3 accused Canada of support-

ing "coup plotters" and "destabilizers" attempting to overthrow the government, according to a Canwest news report.

"I am talking of a Canada governed by an ultraright that closed its Parliament for various months to [evade] an investigation over the violation of human rights," Chaderton said, adding that he was referring to "torture and assassinations" by Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan.

While Prime Minister Stephen Harper's decision last December to prorogue Parliament did receive criticism over disruption of a parliamentary inquiry, the allegations actually have to do with whether Canadian troops transferred detainees to Afghan authorities despite warnings that they may be tortured.

Last Sunday, while Chavez praised Chaderton during his weekly television broadcast, Kent, who was an award-winning broadcast journalist prior to his election, condemned Chaderton's comments.

"It's offensive, it's unacceptable, and it is desperation rhetoric... Democratic space within Venezuela has been shrinking, and in this election year, Canada is very concerned about the rights of all Venezuelans to par-



SEEKING BROADCAST FREEDOM: Marcel Granier, director of Venezuelan opposition private TV station RCTV, arrives on Feb. 8 at the headquarters of the Organization of American States in Caracas, to present a document regarding the government's order to close RCTV and five other cable TV stations for refusing to air President Hugo Chavez's speeches as required under a law passed in December. MIGUEL GUTIERREZ /AFP/GETTY IMAGES

ticipate in the democratic process," the minister told Canwest.

Kent's Jan. 28 statement was made shortly after a trip to Venezuela and Bolivia, whose aim was to "allow Canada to advance the key objectives of its engagement in the Americas: democratic governance, prosperity, and security."

Kent said that when he was in Venezuela only the chair of the foreign relations committee was available to meet with him, but no senior government officials.

He also met with civil society representatives, who were "anything but

coup plotters."

"They are respected members of civil society who have concerns across the spectrum of democratic governance and who feel and have been threatened in a variety of ways as they try to exercise some of the democratic practices and principles that Venezuela has committed to in signing the Inter-American Democratic Charter," he said.

Kent noted that "in the past, our obsession with consensus and resolving differences within the [OAS] has sometimes meant that countries don't speak out against those who are less

diligent in defending the principles of democracy [for] which we all officially pledged to defend."

However, "it is quite clear that there are issues and that legitimate dissent has been suppressed, and we're concerned about that."

Venezuela passed a law last December requiring all national media outlets to broadcast government officials' speeches. The six television stations were taken off the air on Jan. 24 for refusing to broadcast the leftist president's frequent fiery and lengthy speeches.

Chavez, first elected in 1998, was

re-elected in December 2006 with 61 percent of the vote. Since then, the president, who has a military background, has markedly intensified political reforms. On Feb. 15, 2009, Venezuelans voted in favour of a constitutional amendment to remove term limits on all elected offices. Canada, the OAS's second largest financial contributor with an assessed contribution of approximately \$11.4 million in 2010, is monitoring the impact these reforms may have on the standards of democracy and human rights endorsed by all OAS member states.

University loses China accreditation after Dalai Lama honour

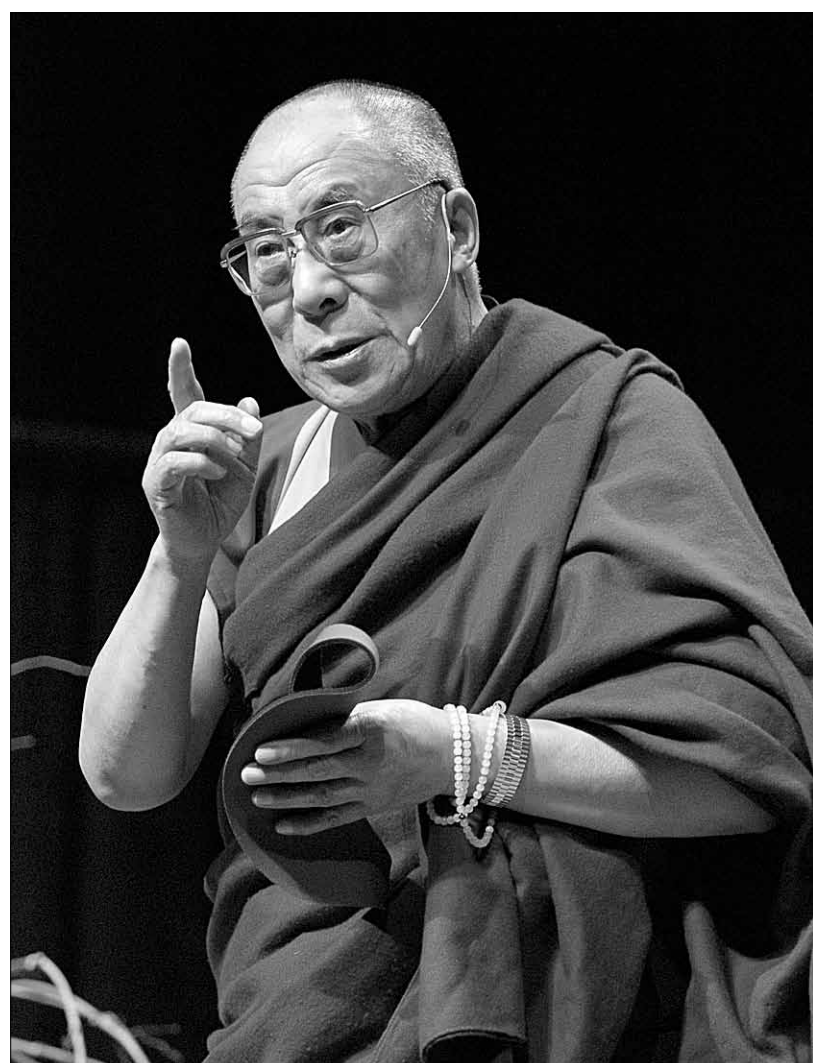
By JOAN DELANEY
Epoch Times Staff

The Chinese regime's vehement opposition to recognition of the Dalai Lama has meant repercussions for the University of Calgary, which hosted the Tibetan monk and awarded him an honorary degree during his visit to Calgary last September.

The university, which has about 600 students from Mainland China and Hong Kong, confirmed last week that it had been removed from the Chinese Ministry of Education's list of accredited institutions in December.

'If we don't change China through constructive and substantive engagement, China will change us.'

— Dermod Travis



REPERCUSSIONS: The Dalai Lama during his visit to Ottawa in October 2007. The Chinese regime has penalized the University of Calgary for awarding the Dalai Lama an honorary degree by removing it from the Chinese Ministry of Education's list of accredited institutions. SAMIRA BOUAOU/THE EPOCH TIMES

Chinese regime "chooses to bully rather than reason in order to resolve differences."

"That a foreign power should be so out of touch as to believe that they can intimidate a Canadian university through such tactics would be even more astonishing if it were not the Chinese government doing the intimidating," said CTC executive director Dermod Travis in a statement.

U.S. President Barack Obama's plans to meet with the Dalai Lama later this month has also drawn strong criticism from the Chinese regime, which was already upset with America's recent \$6 billion arms sale to Taiwan.

China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Ma Zhaoxu said Beijing is

firmly opposed to any contact between Obama and the Dalai Lama and warned the visit could further undermine China-U.S. relations.

Travis said western governments need to realize that "if we don't change China through constructive and substantive engagement, China will change us."

"The decision to delist the University of Calgary is only the latest illustration of the authoritarian measures that the Chinese government will attempt to export to western democracies unless we make it abundantly clear that we will not be bullied by authoritarian regimes in our own countries," he said.

The Dalai Lama has been awarded more than 25 honorary degrees from institutions around the world, in-

cluding in Canada. In 2006, Canada made him an honorary citizen.

The reason the regime reacted so strongly to U of C in particular could be linked to a generous donation to the university.

Henry Fok Ying-tung, one of Hong Kong's most powerful entrepreneurs who had forged strong ties with Beijing, in 2006 gave the university \$2 million toward a new international residence for students and visiting scholars.

Fok, who died in 2006 at age 83, was especially close to former Chinese Communist Party head Deng Xiaoping. He was involved in numerous business ventures in China and was also vice president of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference—an elite body involved in making important national level political decisions.

Conservative MP Rob Anders, whose riding includes the U of C, told the Calgary Herald that any move by China to sanction the university would be "childish."

"That would be kind of cutting off their nose to spite their face. China would be making a mistake to go down that route," said Anders, who has long opposed China's occupation of Tibet.

"It's obviously a cheap manoeuvre given the widespread support the Dalai Lama has," he said. "It seems kind of petty."

Doug Horner, Alberta's minister of advanced education, said he will look into getting the situation resolved.

"We understand both points of view. Obviously, we'd like to see the situation rectified as soon as possible," he told the Herald.

Horner added that although he does not believe the move means Chinese students' degrees won't be recognized, the delisting will mean a reduction in Chinese enrolments at the U of C.

He said an upcoming trade mission to China planned for later this year could present an opportunity to talk with regime officials about "what we can do to help the situation along."

Beijing has long sought to vilify Tibet's widely respected exiled spiritual leader in the eyes of the world by branding him a separatist who has fomented violent unrest in his home country.



BEWARE: Proposed legislation would require putting radiation warning labels on tanning beds that show a link between ultraviolet rays and melanoma, the most fatal kind of skin cancer. DONALD MIRALLE/GETTY IMAGES

Tanning association opposes new tanning bed bill

By HELENA ZHU
Epoch Times Staff

Tanning salon operators are critical of proposed legislation that would warn consumers of the skin cancer risks associated with tanning beds.

The Joint Canadian Tanning Association (JCTA) also says there's no scientific evidence linking tanning beds to skin cancer or melanoma.

"We don't think the science even comes anywhere near supporting such a notion," JCTA President Doug McNabb told the Canadian Press.

Conservative MP James Bezan plans to introduce a federal bill in March that would require putting radiation warning labels on tanning beds that show a link between ultraviolet rays and melanoma, the most fatal kind of skin cancer. The labels would be placed where they could be clearly seen.

"I'm strictly talking about a consumer awareness campaign of labelling the risks so that those who are using a tanning salon, especially those under 18, are aware that their risks to a carcinogenic exposure are greatly escalated when they are in an artificial tanning system," said Bezan.

"We think it's a little grandstanding politically," McNabb said of Bezan's bill. The JCTA is calling on the provinces to instead help regulate industry operating standards.

Early in 2009, the International Agency for Research on Cancer, a branch of the World Health Organization, moved ultraviolet-emitting tanning beds to its highest cancer risk group and labelled them as "carcinogenic to humans," along with cigarettes, arsenic, and asbestos.

The report also stated that the risk of skin cancer is increased by 75 per-

cent when a person starts using tanning devices before the age of 30.

"Childhood exposure to UV and the number of times a child is burnt by UV, either from the sun or from sunbeds, are known to increase the risk of developing melanoma later in life," reads a statement on WHO's website.

The Canadian Cancer Society, WHO, and the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection strongly recommend the restriction of minors under 18 from using tanning beds.

But JCTA favours a looser rule that would require parents of those under 16 to sign an approval form in the salon. The association says that skin type, rather than age, matters the most in determining whether tanning is damaging. It does not advise those with fair skin to use tanning beds regardless of age.

"Banning minors from professional salons will only make the problem of overexposure worse," said McNabb, adding that teenagers would then use inexpensive and unregulated methods to tan at home.

He estimates that roughly two to three percent of salon clients are under 18 while less than half a percent are under 16.

The Canadian Cancer Society would also like to see the entire tanning industry regulated, including requiring a licence for UV-emitting equipment and for all staff who work with it, according to CP.

Bezan was motivated to propose the legislation after his wife, a "sun worshiper" who used both natural sunlight and tanning beds, was twice diagnosed with melanoma.

"I'd like to see people avoid those circumstances that we've gone through as a family," he said.