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Mr László Tőkés MEP
Vice-President of the European Parliament
Ms Barbara Lochbihler MEP
Chair, Subcommittee on Human Rights
European Parliament
Rue Wiertz 60
1047 Brussels

Dear Mr. Tőkés,

Thank you for your letter of 18 October, regarding the self-immolation of several Tibetan monks.

I fully share your concerns over these shocking events. It has been clear for some time that measures implemented by the Chinese authorities appear seriously to undermine the religious, linguistic and cultural rights of the Tibetan minority. The EU raised the issue at the last EU-China human rights dialogue on 16 June. It expressed its concerns on a number of issues, including the increasing legal restrictions on religious practice in Tibet, the limitations on the teaching of the Tibetan language, the ongoing official campaign against Tibetan intellectuals and cultural figures, and the impact on Tibetan culture of the forced resettlement of nomads.

The EU also raised the situation at Kirti monastery, and in particular the self-immolation of Phuntsog Jarutsang. It called on the Chinese authorities to allow all Tibetans, including monks, to exercise their cultural and religious rights without hindrance, and to refrain from the use of force against peaceful protest. The Chinese reply dismissed the EU's concerns, and emphasized that Chinese policies in Tibet had led to significant economic development. China claimed that the self-immolation of Phuntsog Jarutsang represented an "organised plot" by the monks, for which the perpetrators had been sent for "legal awareness" education.

Since then, several more Tibetan monks have set fire to themselves. The fact that so many Tibetan monks have chosen to take such tragic steps demonstrates the profound and continuing depth of feeling among many Tibetans that their rights are not being respected. On my behalf, Commissioner Kroes underlined our concerns on this issue in the emergency Parliamentary debate of 27 October.

The EU remains fully engaged on this issue. It urges the Chinese authorities to refrain from implementing policies which undermine the religious, linguistic and cultural rights of the Tibetan minority. It urges them to address the root causes of the self-immolations – in particular the lack of genuine participation by the Tibetan population in the development policy of the region – and to enter into a meaningful dialogue with representatives of the Tibetan minority.

Sincerely,

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Catherine Ashton