

Inter-Parliamentary Union
To att. of the Executive Committee

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1218 Le Grand-Saconnex
Geneva, Switzerland

The Hague, 27 May 2021

Dear Mr President, dear members of the Executive Committee,

In the course of the 12 Plus Geopolitical Group virtual coordination meeting held on 21 May 2021 in connection with the current 142nd Assembly, several member delegations raised their concerns regarding the recent imposition of sanctions on parliamentarians in a number of 12 Plus member group countries by national authorities in China.

Following detailed discussion, I prepared a statement on this matter which I attach by way of explanation reflecting the position and concerns. I also would like to point out that the sanctions against parliamentarians are not lies, as Mr Chen said during the 207th session of the Governing Council, but facts published on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China announcing sanctions on relevant US, Canadian, UK and EU individuals and entities (attached to this letter).

Additionally, on behalf of the members of the 12 Plus Group I write to you to suggest you raise this matter with the members of the Executive Committee, or through any other channels as appropriate, to explore how this very worrying issue which goes to the core of the purposes and objectives of the IPU might best be addressed on the agenda of the current IPU Assembly, mindful of the unusual circumstances which prevent the addition of emergency items or resolutions to the agenda.

Finally, I inform you that I will ask the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians whether violation of the rights of parliamentarians to freedom of expression and opinion by another country might fall within the ambit of this Committee, noting this is certainly an issue within its mandate in the case of action against a parliamentarian by their own government. If the matter is not within the scope of the Committee, 12 Plus members would like to consider if the mandate of the Committee needs to be extended or if there is another appropriate IPU mechanism to address this matter.

I am grateful for your consideration of this matter and I look forward to your response to report back to the membership of the 12 Plus Group.

Yours sincerely

Arda Gerkens
Chair of the 12 Plus Geopolitical Group of the IPU

12+ Group Statement Defending the Rights of Parliamentarians to Freedom of Expression and Opinion

1. We, the members of the Twelve Plus (12+) Geopolitical Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) speak out to defend the fundamental right of all parliamentarians anywhere in the world to freely express themselves without fear or favour in the course of their parliamentary duties, particularly on the floors of our legislative chambers and in our committee rooms. This is a sacrosanct principle which lies at the very core of representative democracy which has always been upheld and reflected in the values, aims and objectives of the IPU since its inception.
2. Defending this principle, 12+ Group members are deeply concerned by the recent actions of the national authorities of the People's Republic of China to impose unilateral travel and assets freezes on a number of 12+ Group member parliaments. Such sanctions have been imposed for parliamentarians carrying out regular duties to debate and raise awareness on foreign policy issues. The matters mentioned have been widely discussed in relevant UN fora and by various international bodies, namely long-standing issues in Tibet, the treatment of the Uyghur people in Xinjiang and restrictions on democracy and political activity in Hong Kong. Most parliaments have an external affairs function where comment on other countries is normal and routine in the regular conduct of international diplomatic relations, as it is also a primary purpose of the IPU.
3. In seeking to discuss specific human rights concerns regarding China in an open, transparent and inclusive manner, these parliamentarians, including respected leaders of national IPU groups and Foreign Affairs Committee Chairs, have been singled out unfairly, despite being open to China responding to such matters and being willing to hear all sides and perspectives in the normal parliamentary tradition. As there is no recourse to review or appeal such sanctions, they appear largely intended to silence critics, end debate and avoid external scrutiny and have been imposed not only on parliamentarians but also academics and respected human rights bodies.
4. It has long been accepted in the IPU that our member parliaments have many differing and diverse forms of governance based on national circumstances and democratic traditions. Likewise, it has always been the practice that all IPU members, in the spirit of dialogue and inclusivity, refrain from seeking to impose upon others their will by threat or coercion, instead encouraging and facilitating dialogue, cooperation and friendship, avoiding creating rancour and division among IPU members.
5. The members of the 12+ Group express their solidarity with all parliamentarians affected by such coercive and unfair restrictions, noting the IPU specifically recognises the violation of freedom of expression and opinion as matter deserving the attention of the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians. In that regard, the 12+ Group seeks a determination from the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians if these recent actions by China fall within the ambit of the Committee's work or if its mandate warrants review to see how such violations of the human rights of parliamentarians by another country might best be addressed given the unprecedented nature of these actions.
6. The 12+ Group is also particularly concerned that China not be allowed to threaten or enact similar punishment against parliamentary participants in IPU meetings in the future for statements in the course of official meetings, including potentially blocking the participation of certain members, including those currently sanctioned, in IPU meetings hosted by China. As a condition of China hosting any further IPU meetings, the 12+ Group calls for the IPU to register with China's IPU representatives and its government that sanctions against parliamentarians are contrary to the principles and traditions of the IPU and must be reversed as a matter of utmost urgency.