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Europe's response to China's human rights violations in Tibet

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With just six months to go to the Olympic Games in Beijing, the Chinese Government is continuing its human rights abuses. During the past weeks, the most obvious violations have occurred in Tibet.

Since the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1949, more than 150 000 Tibetans have fled their native country and it is estimated that 3 000 Tibetans flee across the Himalayas every year in search of a freer life. In addition to the perils of death or severe frostbite, they risk torture and imprisonment if caught by the Chinese military. The Chinese regime has constantly limited the Tibetans' right to practise their religion, freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. It is also highly disputable whether any of the natural resources that are harvested by the government actually benefit the Tibetans.

The current abuses are probably the worst in a long time, but China has a long-standing record of violations against the Tibetan community.

On 10 March, it was reported that a group of demonstrators, mainly monks, were injured and taken into custody in central Lhasa. The purpose of the demonstration was to mark the 49th anniversary of the Dalai Lama's flight from Tibet. On 11 March, according to eyewitnesses and media, the Chinese police used tear-gas and electrical prods to break up a group that was demanding the release of monks who had been arrested earlier.

Amnesty International, among others, has severely condemned these breaches of human rights. Demonstrators have the right to peaceful gatherings and protests. China is breaking international human rights law by denying the Tibetans their right to freedom of speech and freedom of assembly.

It is high time for the rest of the world to mark – strongly – that the recent events in Tibet are unacceptable. Members of the world community must recognise that human rights are universal.

I therefore ask whether the Committee of Ministers agrees that the actions of the Chinese authorities represent an infringement of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights.

Within the Council of Europe's mandate to protect human rights, how does the Committee of Ministers plan to act in order to ensure that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is followed by the Chinese Government?

