

Bath and North East Somerset Council

Full Council meeting 17th November 2022

Motion from Councillor Andy Furse - Ending of B&NES Jianxi Province (and city of Jingdezhen) Friendship Agreement

To be proposed by Councillor Andy Furse

Council notes:

In view of the OHCHR Report released on 1st September on Human Rights concerns with Xinjiang Uyghur region in China, it is now time we ceased our Friendship agreement with Jianxi Province and City of Jingdezhen.

The creation of such a Friendship agreement with Jianxi Province (a province of approximately 45million people) in October 2009 was at a time when the PRC was considered to be respecting the freedoms of its people, respecting the international agreements in Hong Kong and not showing any aggression in the region.

However, over the time we have had our agreement in place there has been: political suppression and the breaking of international agreements in Hong Kong, expansionism in the South China Sea, serious military threats to democratic Taiwan, and now the United Nations report on human rights abuses on the Uyghur population specifically in Xinjiang region.

Our friendship agreement signals a friendship with the Chinese Communist Party in Jianxi Province. The same regime that is criticised in the UN Report in Xinjiang.

Furthermore, at a local level there has been no news of this friendship agreement from either the cabinet or council officers for a long time and no known economic benefit to B&NES.

Corresponding with Council officers and economic development officers recently, has confirmed that there hasn't been any involvement on this for around 6-7 years (since John Wilkinson was head of Economic Development). So, there is no value or benefit in the relationship and it would appear to be non-functioning anyway.

To retain such an agreement gives tacit support to Jiangxi province, and the Chinese Communist Party and thus its human rights abuses of Uyghurs, oppression of Hong Kong and threats to democratic Taiwan. The Chinese Communist regime's actions repeatedly demonstrate that it is not concerned with upholding the universal values we safeguard and does not adhere to international rules of conduct for example: -

- *Unless where specifically set out in the statute, motions approved at Council do not bind the Executive (Cabinet) but may influence their future decisions.*
- *Councillors are reminded of their public sector equality duty which requires the Council to consider or think about how their policies or decisions may affect people who are protected under the Equality Act.*

- It is widely reported and well documented that at least a million Uyghurs have been forcibly detained in so called “re-education” camps in China.
- Survivors who have escaped have talked about their experience which include internment, rape, torture, forced sterilisation.
- There have been reports of organ harvesting against Uyghurs by the Chinese government, with evidence presented to the UN Human Rights Council
- A number of Uyghurs have submitted evidence to the International Criminal Court calling for an investigation for Crimes of Genocide & Crimes Against Humanity.
- In its latest report, Amnesty International states that: “The human rights situation across China continued to deteriorate. Human rights lawyers and activists reported harassment and intimidation; unfair trials; arbitrary, incommunicado and lengthy detention; and torture and other ill-treatment for simply exercising their right to freedom of expression and other human rights. The government continued a campaign of political indoctrination, arbitrary mass detention, torture and forced cultural assimilation against Muslims living in Xinjiang. Thousands of Uyghur children were separated from their parents.

The National Security Law for Hong Kong enabled human rights violations which were unprecedented since the establishment of the Special Administrative Region.”

- Last year UK academics have been sanctioned by China for research and activism on the plight of Uyghur Muslims. Such sanctions pose a serious threat to the freedom of UK nationals with the potential risk of extradition to China when travelling abroad to friendly nations.

Already, Newcastle, Wakefield and Newport Councils have passed motions to end twinning and friendship agreements with cities in China.

Bath and North East Somerset has a proud history of promoting the advancement of human rights and standing in solidarity with those oppressed. In 1936 Bath became home to Emperor Haile Selassie, home to his campaign for international support of his homeland, Ethiopia, which had been invaded by Mussolini's fascist regime.

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Council therefore resolves;

1. To give notification that Bath & NE Somerset Council will terminate our friendship agreement with Jianxi province and City of Jingdezhen;
2. To express condemnation of the Chinese government's treatment of Uyghur Muslims and human rights activists;
3. To show solidarity with the people campaigning for freedom and democracy in mainland China, Hong Kong and Macau; and
4. To write to the MPs for Bath and for NE Somerset urging them to lobby the Government for action in relation to the treatment of Uyghur Muslims.

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