

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0908

May 4, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write to commend you for the recent release of the 2020 Human Rights Report. In particular, we were delighted that the U.S. State Department removed gratuitous language in the Tibet section of the China report that in prior years had opened the section. The language to which we refer includes: “The Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and Tibetan autonomous prefectures (TAPs) and counties in Sichuan, Qinghai, Yunnan, and Gansu are part of the People’s Republic of China (PRC).”

Legal scholars have noted that for decades Beijing's top strategic priority for Tibet has been to minimize the legitimacy deficit of its territorial claims. Past U.S. statements recognizing Tibet as “part of the PRC” have unintentionally undermined Tibetan efforts to negotiate with Beijing. While these statements were meant to reassure Beijing, they, in effect, compromised the U.S. policy of supporting meaningful autonomy for Tibetans. Prior administrations gave the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) what it desired – a fig leaf of legitimacy for its rule in Tibet – virtually eliminating any incentive the CCP might have had to seek true legitimacy by making a deal with the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government-in-exile.

We should not allow the CCP to define the terms of our interactions with them, or with the people living in the PRC, nor should we uncritically accept how the CCP characterizes the facts on the ground, past or present. The CCP distorts history, and in some cases, rewrites it entirely, to suit its political goals. Experience has taught us that the “correct” understandings of history that the CCP insists others must accept are incomplete or incorrect in important ways.

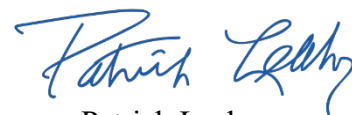
Thank you again for removing this problematic language regarding Tibet. We trust that the same will be done for the Report on Tibet Negotiations, the International Religious Freedom Report, and all other U.S. government reports on Tibet. Beijing has undoubtedly protested the change, but reversing course would be a mistake. We urge you to stand firm, as you have done on other important issues, such as the genocide of Uyghurs and other Turkic and Muslim communities in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

The promotion of human rights and democracy must remain a core element of our foreign policy, and we are prepared to work with you to ensure those issues do not get sidelined in pursuit of other interests with the PRC government. We look forward to working with you on this and other important issues.

Sincerely,



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator



Patrick Leahy
U.S. Senator