



THE HON STEPHEN SMITH MP

MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
PARLIAMENT HOUSE
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Mrs Julia Irwin MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
PO Box 6021
PARLIAMENT HOUSE ACT 2600

09 MAR 2010

Julia
Dear Mrs Irwin

Thank you for your letter of 10 February 2010 about a petition recently submitted for the consideration of the Standing Committee on Petitions on the arrest of Falun Gong practitioner, Ms Sufang Zhang. I make the following response to the Committee under Standing Order 209(b)

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Australian Embassy in Beijing made a number of representations to Chinese authorities to check on Ms Zhang's health, welfare and securing release. I am pleased to be able to inform the Committee that Ms Kun (Suzy) Yang, Ms Zhang's daughter, advised the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on 7 July 2009, that Ms Zhang had been released on 4 July 2009.

The Australian Government has long held concerns about the treatment of Falun Gong practitioners in China. While the Government takes no position on Falun Gong beliefs, it considers that China's ban on Falun Gong and the treatment of its practitioners are in breach of international human rights standards.

The Government has raised the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners in China with senior Chinese officials in Canberra, Beijing and in the context of the Australia-China Human Rights Dialogue, the last round of which was held in Canberra on 9-10 February 2009.

The Government is aware of Falun Gong-related claims of organ harvesting. If true, these reports would be very disturbing. China has denied the allegations and the information we have seen so far is inconclusive.

The Government will continue to raise its concerns on the treatment of Falun Gong practitioners in China with Chinese authorities, including at the next round of the Human Rights Dialogue, which we expect to be held in China in 2010.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Smith