

MAYOR OF LONDON

Navin Shah AM

Chair of the London Assembly

C/o Davena.Toyinbo@london.gov.uk

Our ref: MGLA110920-3917

Date: 19 March 2021

Dear Navin,

I am writing to follow up on your letter regarding the motion agreed at the London Assembly (Plenary) meeting on 10 September 2020. I apologise for the delay in responding.

Motion 2 – China and Sinophobia

I was pleased to receive the Assembly motion about the protection of Uighur Muslims, Sinophobia and London's cooperation agreements with Chinese and other cities. As a former human rights lawyer, I have always been a passionate defender of an independent judiciary, the protection of personal and political freedoms, and fundamental human rights. I would like to thank the Assembly in turn for their dedication to protecting these rights and freedoms.

I agree that what we have seen and continue to witness in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region of China is truly horrific. The scenes of systematic abuse and violence against the Uighurs by the Chinese Government – including arbitrary mass detention, forced labour, and reports of forced sterilisation – are an absolutely barbaric abuse of human rights. These crimes are heinous, and I have and will continue to condemn them in the strongest possible terms.

The world has a duty to protect this minority Muslim community. We need to bring international pressure on the Chinese Government to stop what is happening.

I have spent my life fighting for fundamental human rights, and whilst City Hall does not have any foreign policy making power, I completely support the UK Government in challenging the Chinese Government on this matter, both directly and through the United Nations, as well as the UK's independent tribunal investigating these human rights abuses.

Whilst London does not maintain traditional 'twinning' arrangements with any other city or country, over the years Mayors of London have signed a small number of agreements – whether they are known as Sister, Partnership or Friendship City Agreements – with major cities around the world, including Beijing, Berlin, Dublin, Moscow, New Delhi, New York, Paris, Seoul, Shanghai, Stockholm, Tokyo, Vancouver.

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These agreements were a demonstration of the continuing friendship between Londoners and the people of those cities and have helped to foster cooperation between city officials on issues such as housing, transport, economic development, culture and air quality. As the Assembly notes, the agreements with Beijing and Shanghai were signed by the former Mayors, but as I have made clear many times before, whilst I condemn human rights abuses in China and elsewhere in the strongest possible terms, I have absolutely no quarrel with the people of Beijing or Shanghai themselves.

As a global city, London's insights, perspectives and expertise are highly sought after around the world. The most pressing issues of our time – not least the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate emergency – can only be solved through multilateral engagement and cooperation, both at the national and the local level. London has therefore long played an important role by working with other cities, particularly through international networks like C40, and I remain committed to working alongside other major cities for the benefit of all Londoners.

London's strengths are its openness, tolerance, internationalism and respect for the rule of law, which has made it a beacon for business and people from all over the world. Chinese Londoners and visitors have made, and continue to make, a huge contribution to the life and soul of our capital city – in business, in our public services, culturally and socially – and we value them enormously.

Hate crime towards East and Southeast Asian Londoners is completely unacceptable in this city. As you will recall from my oral MQ answer in March 2020, I am absolutely sickened that some members of this community here in London have faced instances of hate crime, especially as a result of COVID-19. COVID-19 is not a Chinese virus, and it is important that people do not fall into the trap of using this virus as an excuse to denigrate, demean and humiliate people.

I have made tackling hate crime a priority throughout my Mayoralty. Both the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) and I have been regularly engaging with East and Southeast Asian community leaders throughout the pandemic to provide reassurance and raise awareness of available specialist support for anyone who is victimised by these awful crimes. My Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime is writing to the Home Secretary outlining our concerns about the shocking rises in rates of racist hate crime since lockdown. This will highlight, in particular, the problem of Sinophobia and urge the Government to take urgent action to address it.

Like all hate crime, we take a zero-tolerance approach to acts of Sinophobia and are committed to delivering a comprehensive programme of work to tackle hate crime in London. I know that the MPS will do everything it can to ensure that those who commit these awful acts face justice and my Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) continues to monitor increases and spikes in hate crime reporting, including racial hate crime, and are monitoring incidences closely. I thank you sincerely for your support in these shared endeavours.

In recent months, my Deputy Mayor for Social Integration, Social Mobility and Community Engagement, Dr Debbie Weekes-Bernard, has hosted a roundtable with East and Southeast Asian community groups to listen to their experiences during COVID-19, with these community groups actively feeding into the Recovery Board's consultation on missions. My office is also working with a newly formed campaign group 'End the Virus of Racism' the UK's first non-profit dedicated to addressing racism towards people of East and Southeast Asian heritage.

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I will continue to do all I can to celebrate and support London's East and Southeast Asian communities and look forward to working with the London Assembly on future opportunities to do so.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sadiq Khan', with a small '2' written below the 'h'.

Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London