

Tibet activists confront Qian Qichen at State Department

Date : March 22, 2001

Chinese Vice Premier Qian Qichen arrived at the State Department last night to demonstrators protesting China's continued occupation of Tibet.

The group was holding a vigil at the State Department in protest of China's persecution of Tibetans and to urge the Bush Administration to pressure Beijing to restore political freedom to the Tibetan people through peaceful negotiations.

When Qian's motorcade arrived, a Chinese-speaking Tibetan led chants calling for Tibetan self-determination in Mandarin Chinese.

The demonstrators remained in front of the State Department for the duration of Qian's dinner meeting with Secretary of State Colin Powell. During the meeting Powell said of U.S.-China relations, "I believe the best approach to a relationship such as ours is to have candid talks on every aspect of our agreement and disagreement, so this will be the philosophy that I will take into our discussions."

This statement echoes Powell's tone with then-Ambassador Li Zhaoxing in reference to China's poor human rights record in a meeting between the two last month.

"President Bush and Secretary Powell have pledged that they will be frank with China on human rights in meetings here and in Geneva this month," said John Ackerly, President of the International Campaign for Tibet. "It is their responsibility now to voice the conscience of the American people and speak out against Beijing's brutal repression of the Tibetan people."

More than 50 years ago, Tibet was occupied by the Chinese military in a repressive occupation that has left more than one million Tibetans dead.

"Qian Qichen represents a brutal regime which denies all fundamental rights to the Tibetan People," said Ackerly. "China should respond positively to His Holiness the Dalai Lama's initiative for a peacefully negotiated settlement to the Tibetan issue."

The Chinese government continues to refuse to open a dialogue about the status or future of Tibet.