

Refugee crisis: Dalai Lama in plea to put 'interests of humanity' first

At start of UK trip, spiritual leader praises German and Austrian response to crisis but declines to criticise British plan to take only 20,000 refugees over five years

Harriet Sherwood Religion correspondent

Monday 14 September 2015 22.23 AEST

National interests should come second to the interests of humanity, the Dalai Lama has said in relation to the global refugee crisis, as he praised the response of Germany and Austria to those “crying, starving and asking for help”.

However, speaking in Oxford on Monday at the start of a nine-day trip to the UK, the Tibetan spiritual leader declined to criticise the UK government’s proposal to take only 20,000 refugees over five years. “You have to consider many factors, whether you can take care of these people,” he said, adding that Britain was a small country and “you have to be practical”.

Ultimately the only solution to the mass movement of people fleeing war and persecution was “genuine peace” in their home countries and regions, added the Dalai Lama, who will address MPs at Westminster and give a talk at London’s O2 arena during his visit.

Referring to conflict and instability in the Middle East, a major factor behind the current refugee crisis, he said that the US’s forceful response to 9/11 had produced “a lot of unintended consequences”. He added: “The billions of dollars spent on weapons could be spent on education and health instead.”

He called for religious harmony across the globe, saying that faith was depicted as the cause of conflict. “People feel religion is a troublemaker [but in fact] religion teaches compassion, tolerance, forgiveness and contentment.”

The media, he said, should report love and harmony, not just focus on division. “The idea of a clash of civilisations is dangerous,” he said, adding that Islam emphasised love, not bloodshed.

The Dalai Lama, who turned 80 this year, also criticised China’s “politics of suppression”, which he said makes it impossible for people to express their real views. The Chinese government has said it will designate the next Dalai Lama, rather than the figurehead being chosen through the traditional method where Buddhist monks identify their reincarnated spiritual leader after his death.

The Beijing regime routinely vilifies the Dalai Lama - who has lived in exile in India since 1959 - over his demands for greater autonomy for Tibet. China says his true intention is

independence for Tibet, and it strongly objects to heads of state, dignitaries and high-profile figures meeting with him.

The Dalai Lama is to meet MPs at the invitation of the all-party parliamentary group on Tibet, of which the new Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn, is a member. The group exists to pressure the government “to encourage negotiations between the Chinese government and the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government in exile, whilst recognising that Tibet is an occupied country which had independent links with Britain”.

There are no scheduled meetings with David Cameron or any government ministers. The Dalai Lama’s visit comes just a month before the Chinese president, Xi Jinping, is due to travel to Britain for the first state visit in 10 years.

Cameron and his then coalition partner, Nick Clegg, met the Dalai Lama in 2012, triggering a furious response from the Chinese, who accused the government of “conniving at and supporting separatist attempts to achieve Tibetan independence”.

The following year Cameron led a large trade delegation to China, partly to repair the diplomatic damage over the Dalai Lama meeting. At the time, Downing Street said the prime minister had “turned a page” on the issue and had no plans to meet the Tibetan spiritual leader in the future.

Last week, the Chinese authorities cancelled two Bon Jovi concerts in Shanghai and Beijing, reportedly because the rock band used an image of the Dalai Lama as a backdrop during a 2010 performance in Taiwan.

The Dalai Lama’s main public event during his trip is a talk at the 20,000-seat O2 on Saturday, entitled *Compassion: the Foundation of Well-being*. Proceeds from the sale of tickets - with prices ranging from £24.75 to £90 - will go to the Tibet House Trust, the Dalai Lama’s UK charity, a spokesman said.

The spiritual leader will also join Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, in leading a two-day private symposium at Cambridge University. The purpose was “to shape humane, compassionate, intelligent responses to the various crises that confront us today”, Williams said.

[More news](#)

Topics

[Dalai Lama](#)

[Religion](#)

[Refugees](#)

[Migration](#)

Save for later Article saved

Reuse this content

View comments