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China continues to face significant human rights challenges, but throughout 2015 improved social and economic rights, and implemented reforms to strengthen the rule of law. The UK supports these goals. We cooperated with China on projects in priority areas including torture prevention, the death penalty, women's rights, and civil society. We assess that our co-operation contributed to a reduction in the number of crimes subject to the death penalty. We also believe it led to greater legal protection for victims of domestic violence and rape.

In 2015 civil and political rights were subject to increasingly tight restrictions and space for civil society was constrained. There were restrictions on religious observance and cultural expression by minorities. Online and media censorship continued, with China reportedly jailing the largest number of journalists worldwide in 2015. A number of civil society organisations were closed, and EU nationals working in China detained and expelled. New laws and regulations, including National Security and Counter-Terrorism Laws, further restricted freedom of expression. Hundreds of human rights lawyers and associates were detained by Chinese authorities. The handling of these individual cases, as well as those of other human rights defenders (HRDs), such as Pu Zhiqiang, raised questions over China's commitment to transparency and its international human rights obligations.

Throughout 2015, the UK consistently raised its human rights concerns with China, including at the highest levels. The UK- China Human Rights Dialogue remained an important channel for relaying our concerns and exchanging views. The 2015 Dialogue focused on the role of the judiciary. We also acted on cases of concern, including working closely with international partners on specific cases. This was done through lobbying on legislation (such as a draft Foreign NGO Management Law), attempts to visit individuals under house arrest, attempts to observe trials, and maintaining contact with HRDs. We raised human rights in China at the UN Human Rights Council, making clear our concerns over a crackdown against human rights lawyers, including Wang Yu. We were particularly concerned about the case of British citizen Mr Lee Po. As the Foreign Secretary said in the most recent Six Monthly Report on Hong Kong, our information indicates that Mr Lee was involuntarily removed to mainland China from Hong Kong. This case undermines the principle of "One Country, Two Systems" which provides for Hong Kong residents to be protected by the Hong Kong legal system.

Barriers to achieving our aims included China's reluctance to accept meetings to discuss sensitive issues. Requests for human rights monitoring visits to Tibet were refused.

In 2016, the government's "stability maintenance" policies look set to continue. These are likely to target groups perceived as disruptive. Many of those detained in 2015 may face further legal action. Proposed laws on foreign NGO management and cyber security may further restrict political space. We will work with the grain of reform where we judge this will yield meaningful progress, for example on rule of law. We will continue to raise human rights issues through whichever channel is most effective.

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