

China Voices Appreciation After SAfrica Bars Dalai Lama

Written by Rudi Prinsloo

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China expressed appreciation Tuesday for countries that shun the Dalai Lama, a day after South Africa denied the exiled Tibetan spiritual leader an entry visa.

"All countries should respect China's sovereignty and territorial integrity... and oppose Tibetan independence. We appreciate relevant countries' measures," foreign ministry spokesman Qin Gang told reporters.

Qin did not specifically mention the South African move.

South Africa said on Monday that the Dalai Lama was denied a visa to travel to Johannesburg for a meeting with other Nobel laureates out of concern that his visit would overshadow preparations for the 2010 football World Cup.

The Dalai Lama was billed to attend a conference backed by the Nobel Peace Committee and hosted by South Africa's three surviving laureates, former presidents Nelson Mandela and FW de Klerk, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

The Nobel peace prize committee said it would not participate unless the Dalai Lama, the 1989 peace prize laureate, was allowed in. Both Tutu and De Klerk also have said they would no longer attend, casting doubt on the meeting.

China's minister counsellor at the embassy in Pretoria, Dai Bing, was quoted by South African media as saying that his government had urged South Africa to deny the visit or risk damaging bilateral relations.

Qin, the foreign ministry spokesman, declined comment when asked about China's role.

China vehemently opposes any overseas activities by the Dalai Lama, whom it considers a separatist seeking independence for his Himalayan homeland. He denies such charges.

He angered China earlier this month by marking the 50th anniversary of a failed uprising with a speech saying Chinese control had turned Tibet into a "hell on earth."

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