

INTERNATIONAL
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China rejects human rights criticism at UN

The Associated Press

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GENEVA: China rejected proposals Wednesday to end labor camp sentences, abolish the death penalty and guarantee freedom of religion, as it concluded its first examination before the U.N. Human Rights Council.

Beijing, which in the past fought successfully to avoid any criticism before the U.N.'s top human rights organ, struck down virtually every suggestion made by countries such as Britain, Mexico and Germany, in a new procedure designed to open every country to scrutiny.

Still, rights groups said they were happy that several important issues had been raised publicly at the U.N. for the first time and included in a 32-page report.

The recommendations dismissed by China also included ending torture, respecting ethnic minorities and allowing independent experts to investigate human rights abuses.

"We're disappointed that China failed to deal with many of the most serious human rights issues," said Corinna-Barbara Francis of London-based Amnesty International. "We definitely thought they would commit to do something about torture."

China said it did support proposals mostly by developing countries to improve social and economic rights such as creating jobs in rural areas and doing more to integrate people with disabilities.

The report, which was compiled after a heated three-hour debate Monday, contained a plethora of praise for Beijing and sharp words for its critics.

_Cuba urged its fellow communist country to crack down on self-appointed human rights defenders "attacking the interests of the state and the people of China."

_Pakistan blamed the clashes during last year's anti-government protests in Tibet on criminals who had "disturbing links to external perpetrators with ulterior motives."

_Sri Lanka rejected malignant criticisms by those who tore China into little pieces in the period of colonialism" and noted China had achieved independence and self-determination for its people, according to the report.

Campaigners said the praise showed how some countries use the U.N. council to undermine efforts for a serious examination of human rights abuses.

"Why don't we look at the human rights records of those countries and see what the value of that kind of praise is?" said Juliette de Rivero, a spokeswoman for New York-based group Human Rights Watch.

She added that China's reaction was a telling indication of how sensitive it is to criticism, despite the fact that the 47-member council has no enforcement powers.

"China wants to look like it's one of the good guys trying to promote human rights in a constructive and objective manner," de Rivero said. "They've clearly shown that they don't."

"Where praise is merited, it should be made," said Amnesty's Corinna-Barbara Francis. "But it should not be at the expense of ignoring what are very serious human rights issues."

Francis said Western countries should recognize that China has made progress in some areas, such as the development of its legal system, over the past two decades.

"But it would help if China was less defensive," she said.

This week's review marked a change, however, from battles before the council's predecessor U.N.

Human Rights Commission when China succeeded in winning votes year after year to prevent that body from formally criticizing the military's 1989 crushing of pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square and other abuses.

China is not the first country to take criticism in the council badly.

On Monday, Cuban Vice Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez Parrilla reacted angrily to the fact that some reports of his country's review omitted to mention all of the praise it received from allies such as North Korea, Russia and Saudi Arabia.

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On the Net:

U.N. review of China: <http://tinyurl.com/d7npmq>

Correction:

Notes:

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