I understand that the Dalai Lama is visiting in XX. I am writing to you today to urge you to invite the Dalai Lama to meet with you, in recognition of his status as one of the world’s great spiritual leaders and advocates for peace and to demonstrate that your government will not allow itself to be bullied by the government of China.

As I’m sure you know, Beijing objects in robust terms to any meeting with the Dalai Lama, on the grounds that he is a “splittist” and to meet with him is “interfering in China’s internal affairs”. Neither of these positions is justifiable. The Dalai Lama is, of course, not a citizen of China – he is a stateless refugee residing in India – and he renounced any role in the exile government of Tibet in 2011. His position on Tibet is to support a “Middle Way Approach” which envisages Tibet remaining a part of the Chinese state. He has been a consistent advocate of dialogue with the government of China and, above all, the peaceful resolution of the issue of Tibet to the satisfaction of both parties.

As a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, the leader of Tibetan Buddhism (which has millions of adherents globally) and one of the most deeply respected public figures in the world, national leaders have for decades recognised that meeting the Dalai Lama is entirely appropriate to their responsibilities and aspirations. President Obama very recently described him as “a good friend” who “inspires us to speak up for the freedom and dignity of all human beings”.

Recently, China’s objections and accompanying threats have deterred many leaders from continuing the tradition of meeting him. In fact, research has shown that while Beijing may threaten “dire consequences”, doing so has no discernible effect on trade with China. What it does do is demonstrate that legitimate and democratic governments are willing to allow China – an authoritarian and anti-democratic state - the right to interfere in their affairs. It also sends a message to China that instead of engaging in dialogue to promote the peaceful resolution of the ongoing crisis in Tibet, they can continue with the repression and assimilation that have caused Tibetans such deep distress and provoked unceasing resistance and protest. Meeting the Dalai Lama alone will not solve Tibet’s problems – but it will remind China that the international community stands firmly against its current policies.

I urge you to issue an invitation to the Dalai Lama to meet with you while he is in our country. To do so would be a demonstration of your commitment to peace, dialogue and religious tolerance and would show the people of Tibet that you recognise the legitimacy of their grievances and their desire for the freedom enjoyed by our citizens. It would also affirm your respect for the path of non-violence they have chosen and demonstrate that you put the principles that guide our democracy and respect for human rights above the blatant and illegitimate attempts by the government of China to impose its will on your actions.