



## PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

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### Centre for Human Rights supports statement by Minister of Health

The Centre for Human Rights at the Faculty of Law, University of Pretoria, wishes to add its voice in support of the position taken by Minister Barbara Hogan criticising the denial of a visa to his holiness the Dalai Lama to visit South Africa.

The Centre wishes to recall that all affairs of government – including its international relations— should be governed by the Constitution. President Nelson Mandela already in 1993 stated that one of the ‘pillars upon which our foreign policy will rest’ is the ‘beliefs that issues of human rights are central to international relations’.<sup>1</sup>

This position was reinforced on 20 February 2007, when in response to a question posed in Parliament, the Minister of Foreign Affairs confirmed that there has been ‘no change in the fundamental underpinning of our foreign policy since the advent of our democracy in 1994. Our stand on human rights is still the same.’<sup>2</sup>

The refusal of the visa to the Dalai Lama creates the distinct impression that human rights are overridden by political considerations. In the absence of a cogent explanation or justification, one is led to speculate that the decision was taken to avoid discomfort to the Chinese government or ruling party.

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<sup>1</sup> N Mandela ‘South Africa’s Future Foreign Policy’ (1993) 72 *Foreign Affairs* 86 87.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/2007pq/pq25.htm> (accessed 26 March 2009).



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To express critique against such a decision is entirely consistent with the spirit and principles of South Africa's foreign policy, our Constitution, and our international human rights obligations. We salute the Minister for reminding us that silence in the face of political folly has in the recent past cost us dearly. Her courageous stand contrasts with the failure of members of the cabinet to take a clear stand against former President Mbeki's denial of the link between HIV and AIDS.

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