



## **SPEECH TO THE SENATE ABOUT THE SITUATION IN TIBET**

**By Senator Mathias Cormann on 17 March 2008**

[Senator CORMANN](#) (Western Australia) (4.52 p.m.)—I rise to support the deep concerns expressed by previous speakers about the current situation in Tibet and to express support for the motion moved by Senator Brown and the comments made on behalf of the opposition by Senator Payne and Senator Humphries. All senators would be concerned about reports and images of the unrest and the security crackdown in Lhasa, and reports of casualties and arrests. While we do not know the exact extent of what has occurred, all Australians would be concerned, along with people around the globe, about the current situation in Tibet. Of course we are all concerned that demonstrations in Melbourne and Sydney turned violent over the weekend. We support the comments of our foreign minister, expressed on behalf of all Australians, calling for the Chinese government and authorities to act with restraint and for those protesting to be allowed to protest peacefully. Finally, we support the government's call for violence to end quickly and without further casualties.

The peaceful expression of dissent is a critical and fundamental human right. It is a critical human right, which we appropriately take for granted in Australia. We need to continue to press the importance of human rights in general, and the importance of the right to the peaceful expression of dissent in particular, with the Chinese government. Australia of course has a record of expressing its views directly to the Chinese government in a constructive approach based on regular dialogue rather than public confrontation. Australia has a record of encouraging dialogue between the Dalai Lama and Chinese authorities. In that context we support a continuation of the Australia-China Human Rights Dialogue. Senator Payne outlined very eloquently the advances that have been achieved in the field of human rights through that vehicle.

The Rudd government will no doubt continue, and indeed ought to continue, down that path pursued by the previous government. Senator Payne very appropriately called on the Prime Minister to raise Australia's concerns about these latest events directly with the Chinese government during his visit to China next month. In light of his particular affinity and relationship with China, he is likely to be in a better position than perhaps anyone else to press the point in a constructive and outcomes focused way. The reality is that something has to be done to achieve positive change in Tibet, and this should be a good time to do exactly that. The world currently approaches the Beijing Olympics with great excitement and anticipation. The eyes of the world are and will be on China like never before. Of course that necessarily includes a clear focus on China's human rights record. While the government is right to refuse to call for a boycott of the Olympic Games in Beijing, it is right to say that, by the same token, this is a time when China ought to reflect on the image it wants to project to the world. Incidentally in that context I commend the Dalai Lama for his restraint in not calling for a boycott of the Olympic Games either. In line with all previous speakers, I express my support for the urgency motion and hope that those reported events in Tibet will come to a peaceful conclusion at the earliest opportunity.