

Viewing cable 08BEIJING1844, MAY 13 MFA PRESS BRIEFING: SICHUAN EARTHQUAKE, BURMA

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SUBJECT: MAY 13 MFA PRESS BRIEFING: SICHUAN EARTHQUAKE, BURMA

DISASTER ASSISTANCE, SIX-PARTY TALKS

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1. Key points at the May 13 MFA press briefing were:

-- China welcomes offers of international assistance for disaster relief after the May 12 earthquake in Sichuan.

-- No foreign casualties from the earthquake have been reported, but the Foreign Ministry is looking into reports that a group of 15 Britons is missing.

-- Journalists will face difficulties traveling in earthquake-affected areas (some of which are previously closed ethnic Tibetan regions), but the Foreign Ministry will endeavor to "create conditions" for journalists to travel to the affected areas.

-- The spokesman said that China would do its utmost to press ahead with Olympic preparations in spite of the quake, and that the Beijing Olympic Committee would make a determination on whether to make changes to the torch relay.

-- In light of the earthquake, China will continue to assist Burma with the cyclone disaster relief "according to our capabilities."

-- The spokesman noted recent positive progress on the

implementation of Phase II of the Six-Party process, and that normalization of U.S.-DPRK relations had shown "improvement."

China Welcomes International Assistance

¶2. At the May 13, 2008 regular MFA press briefing, MFA Spokesman Qin Gang said that many countries and international organizations (IOs) had sent immediate condolences and expressions of support for China after the earthquake that devastated parts of Sichuan province May 12. Asked if China would accept offers of international assistance for disaster relief, Qin said that China "welcomes" such offers. He said that China has opened "relevant channels" with the international community for accepting such offers and that the Chinese authorities are ready for contact with foreign countries and IOs that want to offer assistance.

No Reports of Foreigners Killed or Injured

¶3. Asked about reports that 15 Britons were among the missing following the earthquake, Qin said that the Foreign Ministry has not yet received any reports that foreigners were killed or injured. He was unaware of the report of the 15 Britons but said that the Foreign Ministry would look into the report. He said that local authorities in the affected areas attach great importance to the safety of foreigners in their areas, and that the Foreign Ministry is in contact with local authorities and foreign embassies and consulates in China to monitor the situation. Asked about reports from the state-run Xinhua news agency that 37 people were killed when a tourist bus fell off a cliff during a landslide related to the earthquake, Qin said he was unaware of the specifics of the report.

Media Coverage of the Quake

¶4. Asked if foreign journalists would be allowed to travel to areas affected by the earthquake given that some of the same areas have been closed following last month's unrest in predominantly ethnic Tibetan areas, Qin stressed that the transportation and communication infrastructure in affected areas has been damaged and that journalists who choose to go would face very difficult circumstances. He noted that roads into the affected areas were destroyed and aid was being delivered by airdrop in some areas. He said the Foreign Ministry would endeavor to "create conditions" for journalists to travel to the areas. He urged journalists who go to the affected areas to remain alert and contact the local Foreign Affairs Office in any emergency. Qin said that the Foreign Ministry had been in contact with foreign correspondents already in Chengdu to ensure their safety.

Sichuan Quake and Olympic Impact

¶5. Asked about the impact of the earthquake on Olympic preparations, Qin said that after the earthquake the Central and Standing Committees of the Chinese Communist Party established a taskforce to give the disaster relief the highest priority. He said

the government is pressing ahead with relief for the affected areas and that the Chinese people are united in the efforts to overcome of the losses due to the quake. In this spirit, he added, China will do its utmost to overcome the damage and continue with the preparations for the Beijing Olympics.

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¶6. Asked if there would be changes made to the Olympic torch relay due to the disaster, Qin said that the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (BOCOG) is assessing the situation and will determine if changes are necessary.

Burma Cyclone Disaster Relief

¶7. Qin said that China has expressed "its solicitude with Burma" following the May 3 cyclone and is monitoring developments there. He noted that China has sent two shipments of assistance and provided money for disaster relief. Asked if the Sichuan earthquake would impact China's assistance with disaster relief in Burma, Qin said that China will continue to help "according to our capabilities."

¶8. Asked for his views on actions by the Burmese government to limit the arrival of foreign assistance into Burma, Qin said that Burma has recently welcomed assistance from the international community. He said that China provides assistance on the basis of the principles of equality and mutual respect, respecting the will of the receiving party and based on its "receiving capability."

Positive Progress in Six-Party Process

¶9. Qin confirmed reports that Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei would meet with South Korean nuclear negotiator Kim Sook May 13 in Beijing. He said that the Six-Party Talks have recently been making progress on actions related to Phase II, including "some progress" on denuclearization and the "implementation" of aid to the DPRK. Qin said that "normalization of relations between the United States and the DPRK has improved" and that the two sides recently had contacts, which the Chinese side viewed positively.

¶10. In the Wu-Kim meeting, Qin said that the two sides would exchange views on how to move forward. Noting that he was unaware of agenda specifics, he ventured that the two sides would take measures to increase mutual trust and discuss practical steps for the implementation of Phase II in a comprehensive way. At the same time, he added, Wu and Kim will discuss the next phase, and China is ready to continue to play a constructive role to maintain cooperation with all relevant parties.

Other

¶11. According to Qin, Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi will travel to Bahrain May 21-22 to lead the Chinese delegation at the 3rd round of

the China-Arab Cooperation Forum.

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