



SFTUK PARLIAMENTARY LOBBYING GUIDE 2010

Why lobby your MP?

- Your MP is there to provide you with a voice on the issues that matter to you – it's their *job* to listen to your concerns and act on them
- The voice of an MP is a lot stronger than the voice of an ordinary member of the public
- MPs can attract media coverage to an issue
- MPs can be very influential on human rights issues - movements like the Ghurka Justice campaign relied on the support of MPs for their success
- Lobbying your MP could not be simpler – as you'll see in this guide!

Finding your MP

- MPs will speak to any constituent (someone registered to vote in their area) but will also generally meet with university student groups based in their constituencies even the members aren't registered to vote there
- To find who your MP is just log on to www.theyworkforyou.com and put in your postcode or university postcode. Alternatively phone the House of Commons switchboard on 020 7219 3000

What your MP can do

- *Write a letter to the Foreign Secretary* – your MP can raise your concerns and requests directly with the Foreign Secretary, who in turn is obliged to give a personal response. This is a powerful way of



highlighting an issue at the top level of government. Your MP will send you a copy of the Foreign Secretary's response which you are allowed to use or quote however you like (in articles, future campaigns etc.)

- *Ask Parliamentary Questions* – MPs can ask the government oral questions in the House of Commons or written questions which go straight to the relevant government department. Both are good ways of highlighting an issue and will go down in the parliamentary record (which can be found at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmhansrd.htm>)
- *Join the All Party Parliamentary Group for Tibet* – as the name suggests this is a group of MPs (and Lords) from all sides of parliament who regularly meet to discuss Tibet and how they can help. They frequently make joint representations to the government and once a year take part in a parliamentary exchange scheme with Tibetan MPs. Any MP can join and there is no obligation to commit a minimum amount of time.
- *Write a letter to the Chinese embassy or a specific company* – MPs can write to other bodies such as the Chinese embassy or companies being targeted for their work in Tibet. A letter from an MP will often carry more weight than one from a member of the public and is a useful way of registering concern on an issue.
- *Sign or table an Early Day Motion* – EDMs are like petitions that can only be signed by MPs. Though they do not carry any formal weight they can be used to raise awareness and demonstrate parliamentary support for a particular cause. In the past they have been used to express concern for Tibetan prisoners, condemn Chinese government actions and call on the government to support human rights in Tibet. You can check the list of currently tabled EDMs at <http://edmi.parliament.uk/edmi/> and ask your MP to sign a specific one, or you can ask them to table one on a particular issue.



Writing to your MP

- The easiest way of contacting your MP is to write them a letter at their House of Commons office:

MP's Name
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

- Running a mass letter writing action can be really useful to a campaign. There are three main ways to do this:
 1. Get each member of your group to write a personal letter to their home MP – this way you can lobby a range of MPs
 2. Get each member of your group to write a personal letter to your university MP – this will focus a lot of lobbying on one specific MP as well as building up your group's relationship with them
 3. Print of standard letters to your university MP and get as many students as possible to complete one with their name, address and signature – there are slightly less effective than personalised letters but you'll get a lot more
- An effective letter should be brief (no more than 1 side of A4), polite and to the point
- A good structure to follow is:
 1. Introduce yourself and outline the situation
 2. Make a request
 3. Thank the MP
- Remember to always include an address in the MP's constituency (your university accommodation if it's your university MP)



Example letter:

Dear xxxxx,

I am a student in your constituency and member of the local Students for a Free Tibet group. We have recently be campaigning on the case of xxxxx from xxxxx who has been sentenced to xx years for the crime of flying a Tibetan flag and calling for Tibetan independence. This is a clear violation his freedom of speech and is particularly concerning given the treatment Tibetan activists are often subjected to in Chinese jails.

I would like to request that you contact the Foreign Secretary to raise this case as a matter of urgency and table an Early Day Motion expressing support for xxxxx and calling for his release. I would of course be more than happy to provide you with more information should you so wish.

Many thanks for taking the time to address this matter and I look forward to hearing from you.

Meeting your MP

- As well as writing to your MP you can arrange for your group to lobby them in person:
 1. *Invite them to your university*- write to or call your MPs office at the House of Commons and ask if they will visit your university to meet with group members
 2. *Ask to visit them at Parliament* – MPs will generally be happy to meet groups for a short time (about 10 minutes) at Parliament
 3. *Book a surgery appointment* – each week MPs run local surgeries where they meet constituents. Phone their London office (or their constituency office if you know it) and ask for surgery times and dates



- When meeting with your MP make sure you know in advance what you are going to say – be clear and polite about your campaign and about what you would like them to do
- Try to get as many people as possible to come along – this will have more effect. Collect a petition or signatures of other constituents/students who cannot make it
- You're only likely to have about 10 minutes so remember to be concise
- Remember you can bring extra materials (reports etc.) to leave with your MP
- Sometimes your MP will send a staff member instead – this is just as good
- It is perfectly acceptable to ask your MP for a group photo to use on leaflets/websites etc.
- It is a nice idea to bring something for your MP –like a rangzen band, some prayer flags or a photo of the prisoner you're lobbying them about

Keeping in touch

- Over time you will build up a relationship with your MP – it is useful to keep a dialogue going and to keep them up to date with your campaigns
- Remember to invite your MP to your group's talks, fundraisers, film screenings etc. They can raise valuable media coverage if they come along
- Don't be put off if MPs turn down invitations or take time to reply to letters. Parliamentary lobbying can be a slow process but is ultimately an effective one!

For more information, advice or training on parliamentary lobbying please contact Liam Allmark, SFT's Political Lobbying Coordinator on liam@sftuk.org