

Bush China visit may not bring prisoner release

(Leading The Charge) China commonly frees political prisoners before major state visits, but John Kamm, whose Dui Hua Foundation works to free Chinese political prisoners, said that changing attitudes meant there may be no releases ahead of US President George W. Bush's November trip. The releases are seen as giving Beijing bargaining power before visits as a gesture of goodwill. *"There has been a change since the new leadership started"*, Mr Kamm said, referring to Hu Jintao becoming president in 2003. *"There is a new thinking and I have heard that the new leadership is less inclined to do it"*, Kamm said. In a departure from the pattern set by former leader Jiang Zemin, there were no publicised releases before Hu visited the United States in September 2005. One major release in the past year, that of Rebiya Kadeer, an ethnic Uighur businesswoman from Xinjiang, did come days before Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visited China in March 2005. But Kamm said Kadeer's role in exile might have made the Chinese leadership more wary of prison diplomacy. *"The conventional wisdom is that when someone is released from prison (...) especially if they go overseas, they quickly become irrelevant"*, he said. *"Rebiya Kadeer is not irrelevant. She has rapidly become the voice of a people that is voiceless, and I think that too has had a certain impact"*, he said.

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Website: www.tibetinfonet.net
Phone: +44 (0) 20 300 206 33
Fax: +49 (0) 2238 9494466
Email: tin@tibetinfonet.net