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The Faculty of Arts of Charles University was graced once again by the presence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and other experienced speakers, one of the highlights of the Societies in Transmission Forum 2000 taking place in Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland. Prestigious and experienced speakers were present, touching on the topic of Human rights in East Asia, covering matters of religious inequality and the critical nature of liberal democracy with a focus on disparity in China.

The debate was complemented by a range of informed speakers including Tomáš Halík, president of Czech Christian Academy, an acclaimed sociologist and personal friend of the Dalai Lama, offering a European perspective on matters in East Asia. Another outlook was given by Steven Gan, a chief editor of Malaysia's most frequently read newspaper with a history of journalistic controversy. Also present was Chen Guangcheng, a lawyer and civil rights activist who has worked frequently on Human Rights issues in his home country, China. Each of the speakers had an opportunity to highlight and educate on the issues in front of an intimate crowd of academics, students and guests at the Faculty of Arts.

The highly anticipated event started punctually, as the speakers appeared on the stage the entire audience respectfully stood and applauded, with all eyes on the guest of honour His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

After a brief introduction on the topics, Tomáš Halík was invited to speak first to address the issues from a European perspective. Speaking humbly, he explained the importance of human rights in modern society as a result of the European renaissance and its rise to integrity as a result of modernised culture. Explaining the philosophy of the question, and its relevance to the difference in culture, he exclaimed that religion was key to the notion of human rights. He quoted Thomas Jefferson, stating religious freedom to be "the first freedom" emphasising the individual's right to hold unrestrained belief, citing one of the framers of modern democracy.

Steven Gan was invited to speak next, with a greater focus on the question in East Asia. His journalistic experience in Malaysia provided an insightful view, in which he used two stories to express the inequality and directly establish the point of the question. The importance of minority rights in a religious context was the overriding theme, using a wealth of examples from the region including Malaysia, The Philippines and Thailand to emphasise issues to be widespread throughout Asia.

Wonderfully translated into English, Chen Guangcheng's perspective was focused on the state of civil rights and liberties in China. With his hand strongly and supportively grasped by the Dalai Lama, he emphasised the criticality of Democracy for human rights. Mentioning that democracy "cannot resolve everything in a simple way" however is integral to a free society and centres of power should be separated equally. In order to explain this visually, Guangcheng brandished garlic to the surprise of the audience, in order to emphasise the centres of power in a political structure as the cloves represent in the structure of garlic.

As the final speaker to talk, His Holiness addressed the crowd by referring to his first visit to Europe in 1973 and his deep affection for the Czech Republic, wisely explaining that the problem of human rights is not exclusive to Asia but relevant throughout the world. The core of the Dalai Lama's insightful point was that a promotion of democracy is needed, with religious tolerance as a cornerstone for this. He continued explaining that religious countries were experiencing a "moral crisis" and that the promotion of "secular ethics" with a respect for rights of religious people was slowly improving in East Asia. He stated that this was due to a lack of "moral principles", and that as an individual retired from political responsibilities, raising awareness and emphasising transparency for all people is key to the central question.

Despite the severity of issues and the serious tones of the discussion, the infectious positivity of the Dalai Lama felt within the hall, typified by his joke telling nature and adorable laugh forcing a smile onto every face present.

At the close the speakers were rapidly whisked away, with every member of the crowd on their feet clapping with awe and appreciation. The continuous applause and rush to the front emphasised the significance of this unique opportunity to attend such a discussion, and the importance of the relevant matters within a world context.

Sam Pepper is interested in meeting and discussing culture between people from other nationalities. This, he says is one of his favourite hobbies, which led him to great personal development during his Erasmus study period in Prague. He also offers simple English lessons to other European students to gain understanding of other cultures and help others improve with their language skills.

By initially learning meeting people of other European cultures at his home University at Essex, whilst living with French, Swedish and Norwegian people, he says that he has become fascinated in European attitudes, comparing similarities and differences in European politics, popular culture and ways of life. He has always taken a firm interest in current

affairs and hot topics in world politics, therefore relished the opportunity to write about subjects such as disparity in East Asia, European Union immigration and a European multinational MA programme. These opportunities have not only developed his interest in international affairs, but also it has shown him the value of being a European student in the Czech Republic.