

Liu Xiaobo's lawyer blocked from visiting Britain

David Cameron's visit to China has been overshadowed by human rights concerns after Chinese security forces barred the lawyer of Liu Xiaobo, the Chinese Nobel Peace prize winner, from leaving the country.

By Malcolm Moore and Peter Foster in Beijing

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Mr Cameron had barely left Beijing's Capital airport before Mo Shaoping was stopped from boarding a flight to London, where he had been due to speak at a conference organised by the International Bar Association.

The heavy-handed response confirmed the worst fears of diplomats that the prime minister's trade visit to China would be derailed by concerns over China's human rights record.

Some delegates have privately voiced their fears that the visit, which is the first by a Western leader since Liu Xiaobo was awarded the Nobel prize in October, could end in disaster at a time when the British government is desperately trying to improve trade relations with China.

The move also underlined the scant regard that China will pay to Mr Cameron's "full and frank" comments on human rights when he meets with Wen Jiabao, the Chinese prime minister, later today.

Mr Cameron has promised to voice his support for Liu Xiaobo, who is currently serving an eleven-year prison sentence for "inciting subversion", in his meeting with Mr Wen, but Chinese officials have warned him that it will be seen as a direct attack on the validity of China's legal system.

Together with He Weifang, another prominent Chinese lawyer, Mr Mo was questioned at the airport for 40 minutes by the police and told that his trip to the UK posed "a threat to China's national security".

Mr Mo, who argued that Mr Liu's conviction was against China's constitution, has so far been able to avoid the detentions and house arrest orders that have been meted out to scores of Mr Liu's other supporters. By blocking him at the airport, China breached article 13 of the United Nations Declaration of Universal Human Rights, to which it is a

signatory. The article states: "Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country."

The lawyer put more pressure on Mr Cameron to speak up against China's abuses, saying: "No country should avoid talking about human rights with China in order to boost their economic interests, and I am glad the UK has chosen not to go down that route."

He added: "If other countries respect the principle of universal values, that will help China's own social development."

Mr Mo said he had been invited to the seminar, organised by the International Bar Association and due to be held at University College London on Wednesday evening, several months ago and that event was unrelated to Liu Xiaobo's case. He Weifang, a former law professor at Beijing University, China's most prestigious school, was exiled to the far-western province of Xinjiang in 2009 after writing and speaking about legal reform.

No one at the British Embassy in Beijing was available for comment.

China has reacted with sustained fury to the Nobel committee's decision to make Mr Liu the first Chinese winner of a Nobel prize. A series of editorials in the state media have labelled the prize a tool of Western ideology and its award a thinly-veiled attempt to destroy China's one-party political system.

Mr Liu's wife, Liu Xia, has been under house arrest since the award, as have scores of other Chinese activists. It remains unclear who will accept the prize on Mr Liu's behalf during the Nobel ceremony in December, but Dai Qing, a journalist and activist, has confirmed she will attend.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/8118943/Liu-Xiaobos-lawyer-blocked-from-visiting-Britain.html>