

MEETING IN ROME

Italian government backs Jimmy Lai: 'Working for his release'

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

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The Italian government is demanding the release of Jimmy Lai. This official commitment was made yesterday afternoon at the end of the meeting between the son of the imprisoned media mogul and Davide Dionisi, the Foreign Minister's special envoy for the

promotion of religious freedom and the protection of religious minorities worldwide.

The meeting which took place at Palazzo Chigi was organised by the *Bussola /Daily Compass*, which presented Sebastien Lai with the 'Made for Truth' award on Saturday 25 October, as part of its annual conference. "It is necessary to work, also in international forums, using the tools of politics and diplomacy, to put an end to Jimmy Lai's suffering. He has been in prison since December 2020 for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression," said Dionisi on the sidelines of the meeting with Sebastian Lai.

"The Foreign Ministry will play its part," Dionisi assured, emphasising that, as soon as he arrived in China for his official mission in 2023, Minister Tajani made it clear that dialogue and respect for religious freedom form the basis of our civilisation and are fundamental to peaceful coexistence. I recall that he did so while attending Mass in the North at the Cathedral run by the Salesian Fathers. Moreover, on several occasions, the Minister of Foreign Affairs has emphasised the importance of protecting minority rights, political rights and freedom of conscience, and therefore religious freedom. He has worked through targeted diplomatic actions to alleviate the suffering of people of all religious denominations, Christian and non-Christian alike".

The Italian government's involvement marks a significant milestone in Lai's liberation campaign tour of Europe, aiming to raise awareness among as many international stakeholders as possible to pressure China for his immediate release. "China must play an increasingly responsible role in contributing to peace, prosperity and security in Asia and around the world. We would like to see more progress on religious freedom, for example, given that Jimmy is a Catholic prisoner who is denied Mass and the sacraments," Dionisi continued.

At the end of the meeting, Sebastian expressed satisfaction with the government's interest, as well as that of Parliament. Before arriving at Palazzo Chigi, Lai also met privately with Chamber of Deputies Speaker Lorenzo Fontana. Fontana expressed his support for Lai's battle for liberation and awareness, and said that he shared Lai's feelings.

"As a journalist and publisher," Sebastian Lai continued, "my father has been targeted in a clear attempt to stop him from exercising his rights to freedom of expression and association. I call on the support of the Italian government to ensure that the Hong Kong authorities put an end to the prosecution of this sick 77-year-old man and release him."

Director Riccardo Cascioli said he was satisfied because *La Bussola/Daily Compass*

work in recent months had ensured Jimmy Lai's case had become a matter of interest for all the media in Italy. "We are grateful to the government, in particular to special envoy Dionisi for his commitment to follow up on the case by asking the Chinese authorities for Jimmy Lai's release, and to President Fontana for his willingness to listen and follow developments," he continued. We hope," he concluded, "that the affair will be resolved positively, and that the Chinese authorities will release this martyr of truth, if only for humanitarian reasons."