

Hu, Obama acknowledge differences on key issues

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Visiting US President Barack Obama stressed the US' belief in fundamental human rights to his host, Chinese President Hu Jintao (胡锦涛), yesterday, but the two sides acknowledged differences over the thorny issue.

"I spoke to President Hu about America's bedrock beliefs that all men and women possess certain fundamental human rights," Obama told journalists following the two leader's summit as the Chinese president looked on.

"We do not believe these principles are unique to America, but rather they are universal rights and that they should be available to all peoples, to all ethnic and religious minorities," he said.

Obama, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize last month, has been criticized by rights groups for downplaying the rights issue to secure Chinese support in addressing the global financial recovery and terrorism.

A joint statement issued after their talks suggested little if any progress was made on the rights issue during the leaders' discussions.

"Both sides recognized that the United States and China have differences on the issue of human rights," the statement said.

However, it added that the two sides agreed to resume a human rights dialogue in Washington before the end of February.

"We will continue to act in the spirit of equality, mutual respect, and ... non-interference in each other's internal affairs, and engage in dialogue and exchanges on such issues as human rights and religion in order to enhance understanding, reduce differences and broaden common ground," Hu said.

Obama has also taken flak for avoiding an encounter with the Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama last month in Washington so as not to upset Beijing before his high-stakes debut visit in China.

Obama called for the resumption of on-again, off-again talks between Beijing and representatives of the Dalai Lama over Tibet's status, while recognizing that the region is a part of China.

On Monday, during a town hall-like meeting with youths in Shanghai, Obama insisted that the US would always speak out for its core principles.

"These freedoms of expression and worship — of access to information and political participation — we believe are universal rights," Obama told the students.

"They should be available to all people, including ethnic and religious minorities — whether

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they are in the United States, China, or any nation,” he said.

Although his statements were carried widely on the Internet, China’s state-controlled press largely avoided all mention of the rights issue, instead focusing on other aspects of the visit.

Speaking yesterday during a visit to Italy, the Dalai Lama said he appreciated Obama’s appeal to Chinese leaders to hold talks with him over the situation in Tibet.

However, the exiled Tibetan Buddhist spiritual leader said he realized that “limits” existed beyond which the US was not able to express itself on the Tibetan issue, ANSA news agency reported.

The Dalai Lama made the remarks as he met local authorities in the northeastern city of Bolzano.

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