



STATEMENT FROM STEPHEN PERRY, CHAIRMAN OF 48 GROUP CLUB

To Members of the Press

02 July 2020

In recent weeks the 48 Group Club and some of its members and fellows have been the focus of press reports. We make this statement to set out and confirm the position and role of the 48 Group Club and to refute some of the allegations which have been made against us.

It has been reported in the media that we have initiated legal proceedings against the authors of a book entitled “Hidden Hand”. This is not the case. The Club’s legal advisors wrote to the publishers after the book was drawn to the Club’s attention through a German media enquiry and the Club and its members were previously unaware of the book. It became clear that the book contained a number of inaccurate and potentially libelous statements relating to the role and function of the 48 Group Club and some of its members. On taking legal advice the Club wrote to the publishers of the book to request sight of the text and opportunity to correct and respond to the errors in the book. Errors have been acknowledged by the publishers and we are working to correct the others.

With regard to the presentation of fellowships, there is an element of cultural misunderstanding in your reporting here. In China, speakers at events are often awarded with a ‘fellowship’ certificate to thank them for taking the time to prepare and deliver a speech. It is intended as a keepsake to mark an occasion. In China, it would be considered bad manners for the organisers of an event not to present some memento to honour a guest. We appreciate that this is not the form in the UK, but to be accused of trying to ‘groom British elites’ because we are following proper Chinese business etiquette is a gross distortion of the truth. Given the history, role and purpose of the Club, this is a system we have adopted.

We absolutely reject the claim that we target elites. The Club is made up of members of diverse ages and professional backgrounds from both the British and Chinese communities. The Club was founded by British business people who were involved in the import-export trade between the UK and China, and now incorporates British people who have studied Chinese, or who have lived and worked in China, as well as Chinese business people living and working in the UK. Like any trade association which aims to

increase trade between two countries, we try to highlight to government the benefits that trade between our two countries can bring.

Reporting on the 48 Group in recent weeks has created an impression that the activities of the Club are unusual or 'mysterious'. In fact, British business people have created similar clubs or associations to promote their trade with almost every country in the world via membership organisations in London or Manchester. British people who do business with the USA have the British American Business Council, those doing business with the French have the French Chamber of Great Britain, those trading with India have the India Business Group, while British businesses working with Ireland have the British Irish Chamber. The Trade Association Forum estimates that there are as many as 3,500 trade associations in the UK. The 48 Group feels unfairly singled out as 'influence peddlers', when in fact, each and every one of these associations seeks to influence government to do more to increase trade and business in the industry which they represent.

In respect of speeches which Mr Perry has given to student audiences, we would like to point out that there are now more than 200,000 Chinese students attending British universities every year, and many more British students who are interested in learning about how to trade with China. Mr Perry has several decades of experience in the import-export trade between China and the UK, trade which is vital to the future development of the British economy. Young British and Chinese students want to learn about how they can sell their products and services to one another in the future, and we find it bizarre that anybody would suggest there is something underhand about this.

Role of the 48 Group Club

The 48 Group Club is an independent, not for profit company owned by its members on an entirely voluntary basis. It also has associate members and we award honours for those who have made a positive contribution to UK-China relations. These associate members have no connection with the Club other than that honour, unless a separate contribution to the Club is established. As an open and progressive forum we benefit from different views on China which are all discussed internally.

Being an independent body, the 48 Group Club does not have a formal relationship with any other organisation, whether inside or outside China. The only income we receive is from membership subscriptions and sponsorship of events, all of which is properly recorded and placed in the public domain, the same as for any properly regulated UK company. As a body with well over six decades of work on China, we are naturally known to many organisations, bodies and individuals with a similar focus and interests and maintain normal contacts with them. However, we are not part of any 'network', nor do we constitute one. We believe that our long experience provides us with a detailed understanding and interesting perspectives on China that many find useful.