

South Africa denies Dalai Lama visa

by UPI

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa -- South African officials say they acted in the country's best interest by denying the Dalai Lama a visa to attend a peace conference in Johannesburg.

"We cannot allow focus to shift to China and Tibet," said South African presidential spokesman Thabo Masebe, noting South Africa has gained much from its trading relationship with China.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu said he plans to boycott this week's conference, which was to unite Noble laureates, including himself, Nelson Mandela, F.W. De Klerk and the Dalai Lama, who fled Tibet in 1959 after a failed uprising against Chinese rule.

"We are shamelessly succumbing to Chinese pressure," Tutu told CNN.

The conference had been heralded as an opportunity to showcase South Africa's role as a human rights champion ahead of its being the host of soccer's World Cup next year, The Times of London reported.

The Dalai Lama's presence would "divert attention away from the World Cup," Masebe said.

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