

The 52nd Anniversary of the Tibetan Uprising: Common Ground for Tibet and China

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Statement as prepared for delivery by
Kelsang Gyaltzen, Envoy of H. H. the Dalai Lama

Mr. Chairman, honourable members of the Parliament and ladies and gentlemen,

I wish to express my appreciation and gratitude to the European Parliament for its consistent and principled support for the just cause of Tibet and the nonviolent freedom struggle of the Tibetan people. I thank you for convening this timely and important conference to commemorate the 52nd anniversary of the national uprising of the Tibetan people in Lhasa in March 1959.

For the past 52 years since then, Tibet has been under the complete control of the Government of the People's Republic of China. The immense destruction and human suffering inflicted on the people of Tibet are today well known and I do not wish to dwell on these sad and painful events. Tibet today continues to be an occupied country, oppressed by force and scarred by suffering. Despite some development and economic progress, Tibet continues to face fundamental problems of survival. Serious violations of human rights are widespread throughout Tibet and are often the result of policies of racial and cultural discrimination. Yet they are only the symptoms and consequences of a deeper problem. The Chinese authorities view Tibet's distinct culture and religion as the source of threat of separation. Hence as a result of deliberate policies an entire people with its unique culture and identity are facing the threat of extinction.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has always believed that most human conflicts can be solved through genuine dialogue conducted with a spirit of openness and reconciliation. He has therefore consistently sought a resolution of the issue of Tibet through non-violence and dialogue. Right from the beginning of the invasion of Tibet, His Holiness tried to work with the Chinese authorities to arrive at a mutually acceptable, peaceful co-existence. Even when the so-called Seventeen Point Agreement for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet was forced upon him, he tried to work with the Chinese authorities. After all, by that agreement the Chinese government recognized the distinctiveness and the autonomy of Tibet and pledged not to impose their system on Tibet against Tibetan wishes. However, in breach of this agreement, the Chinese authorities forced upon Tibetans their rigid and alien ideology and showed scant respect for the unique culture, religion and way of life of the Tibetan people. In desperation the Tibetan people rose up against the Chinese. In the end in 1959 Holiness the Dalai Lama had to escape from Tibet so that he could continue to serve the people of Tibet.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has led the Tibetan freedom struggle on a path of non-violence and has consistently sought a mutually agreeable solution of the Tibetan issue through negotiations. With this spirit in 1988 in Strasbourg at this Parliament His Holiness the Dalai Lama presented a formal proposal for negotiations. The choice of the European Parliament as the venue to present his thoughts was on purpose in order to underline the point that a genuine union can only come about voluntarily when there

are mutual respect and satisfactory benefits to all the parties concerned. His Holiness the Dalai Lama sees the European Union as a clear and inspiring example of this.

With this proposal, His Holiness the Dalai Lama demonstrated his willingness not to seek the independence of Tibet in resolving the issue of Tibet. The guiding spirit of the Strasbourg Proposal is the pursuit of a mutually acceptable solution through negotiations in the spirit of reconciliation and compromise. This spirit has come to be known as the “Middle Way Approach” of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama left no stone unturned to reach out to the Chinese government. Moreover, in the course of time the Tibetan leadership in exile redefined some features of the Strasbourg Proposal in the spirit of the “Middle-Way-Approach”. A number of components of the “Strasbourg Proposal” were dropped to conform to existing political realities in the PRC. His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan leadership in exile took the courageous decision to seek genuine autonomy for the Tibetan people within the framework of the Constitution of the PRC that ensures the basic needs of the Tibetan people in safeguarding their distinct culture, language, religion and identity and the delicate natural environment of the Tibetan plateau.

In 2002, when direct contact with the Chinese leadership was re-established, the Tibetan leadership in exile had already formulated a clear policy on our approach in the dialogue process. The Tibetan side had only a single agenda in the talks. This single agenda has been to seek genuine or meaningful autonomy for the Tibetan people under a single self-governing organ within the framework of the Constitution of the PRC.

I have the honour to serve as one of the envoys of His Holiness the Dalai Lama entrusted with the task of conducting the talks. We engaged in nine formal rounds of discussion and one informal meeting with our Chinese counterparts since 2002.

Right from the first round of discussions in 2002, we proposed that both sides initiate measures that help building trust and confidence in our relationship. On our part we initiated immediately a number of confidence-building measures. We also requested the Chinese leadership to make a good-will gesture by stopping the denunciation and lifting the ban on the possessions of the photographs of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. We also proposed to expand our contact by allowing visits between Tibetans living in exile and in Tibet and to arrange exchange visits by scholars and experts to academic, cultural and religious institutions in the PRC and as well to institutes of the Tibetan refugee community. When it became obvious that there were major differences on a number of issues between the two parties, including some fundamental ones, we proposed to first concentrate on issues where both sides have common interest in cooperating and to increase the number of meetings to two or three times per year. Moreover, right at the beginning of our contact we had written to President Jiang Zemin, explaining, that our mission was to bring about a face-to-face meeting between His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Chinese leadership. Such a summit has the potential to achieve a breakthrough in opening a new chapter in the relationship between the Tibetan and the Chinese peoples. Consequently, in all the rounds of discussion we raised it again and again.

To our deep disappointment, none of our suggestions and proposals were taken up or accepted by the Chinese side. Nor has the Chinese side reciprocated any of our confidence-building initiatives or presented their own suggestions or proposals for a way forward. Since the start of this dialogue in 2002, the Chinese side has been adopting a position of no recognition, no reciprocity, no commitment and no concession and no

compromise. Although they continue to profess even to these days that the door to dialogue is open, however, so far in actual reality they have been pursuing a strategy of avoiding any progress, decision and commitment. This lack of political will on the part of the Chinese leadership was clearly demonstrated at the 8th round of discussions that took place in November 2008.

In July 2008 during the seventh round the Chinese side explicitly invited us to present our views on the degree or form of autonomy we are seeking. Accordingly, on October 31, 2008, we presented our Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan People to the Chinese leadership. Our memorandum puts forth in detail how the specific needs of the Tibetan people for self-government can be met through the application of the principles on autonomy contained in the Constitution of the PRC.

Unfortunately, the Chinese side rejected categorically our memorandum in its entirety labelling it a demand for “semi-independence” and “disguised independence”. At one point in our discussion the Chinese Executive Vice-Minister Zhou Weiqun stated: “Even the title of your memorandum is unacceptable. How many times do we need to say that the Dalai Lama has no right to speak about the situation in Tibet or in the name of the Tibetan people?” When we asked him why in the first place he had invited us to present our views on autonomy, his answer was: “This was a test to see how far you have come to understand the position and the policy of the Central Government. And you have failed the examination miserably”.

The last round of meeting was more than a year ago at the end of January 2010. We have repeatedly urged our Chinese counterparts to meet as soon as possible. Unfortunately, there has been no positive reply from Beijing so far.

The Sino-Tibetan dialogue since 2002 demonstrates clearly that we Tibetans do not have as of yet a sincere and willing partner for an honest dialogue. It is in this context that this conference is so important. The Chinese leadership must be made to realize that the issue of Tibet cannot be suppressed and silenced unless it is properly addressed and resolved. What is needed is a strong and unified message by members of the international community with regard to the issue of Tibet. World opinion is far from being immaterial to the Chinese leadership.

We Tibetans need your help. First and foremost in opening up Tibet to the rest of the world so that the Chinese authorities and security forces no longer have a free hand in Tibet. International presence will have a restraining influence on the authorities and the security forces and will thus provide some form of protection to the captive Tibetans inside Tibet. Ultimately, we Tibetans need on the other side of the negotiating table a partner who is willing to engage in an honest dialogue with the aim of finding a fair, just and mutually acceptable solution to the issue of Tibet. In today's heavily interdependent world it is not in the hands of the Chinese leaders alone whether the Tibetan people will be able to enjoy a life in freedom and dignity in future or be compelled to live under continued brutal repression. The policies of the European Union towards the cause of Tibet and China have just as much a bearing on the outcome of this tragedy. In this context, once again I wish to express our deep appreciation to the European Parliament for consistently taking the lead in promoting a peaceful resolution of the issue of Tibet.

Thank you very much.