

Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama

10 March 1986

My fellow countrymen, in and outside Tibet:

It is 27 years since the people of Tibet, the Land of Snows, started the great movement to regain our freedom and rights. The Tibetan people are sincere, polite, good-natured and intelligent. Consequently, in a world of diverse peoples the Tibetans have built a good reputation for themselves. And in recent times these very people stood up for their rights against great odds and in the process over a million were killed and many more had to endure immeasurable mental and physical suffering. Today, we remember these valiant patriots and pledge to continue the struggle with greater courage and determination so that their aims and aspirations are fulfilled. In spite of the recent slight improvement of conditions in Tibet our people have remained steadfast and firmly committed to our aspirations. This is particularly commendable and I take this opportunity to express my deep sense of admiration and gratitude.

Tibet is racially, culturally and geographically distinct from any other nation. But today, it is a colony and most foreign visitors to Tibet observe that the Tibetans do not want to live under alien occupation.

The achievement of the just cause of Tibet depends on many factors, but primarily on the unflinching courage and relentless determination of our people. Until we achieve our ultimate noble goal we must always keep up our morale and determination. We must not be contented with temporary easing of conditions and must never fall prey to complacency.

At this time there is one particular point that I would like to explain and stress. One of the main reasons for the distinctive identity of the Tibetan people is our cultural heritage. We must, therefore, recognize the importance and the value of our own language, literature, and traditions, including our way of dressing. By cherishing our cultural heritage we must make every effort to preserve and promote all its aspects. With this as a foundation we should develop the desire and will to widen our knowledge in order to acquire a complete modern education. Time and opportunities should not be wasted. This is particularly important for the young, who are at the crucial stage of their mental and physical growth. Another point I would like to mention is that these days the Chinese, forced by self-interest, are conforming to international norms of behaviour by adopting policies that are less dogmatic. This is to be praised and welcomed. In Tibet, too, there has been some liberalization of Chinese policies, some efforts to improve the economy of the people and, unlike in the past, a little more interest in the culture of the Tibetan people. However, for the past thirty years or more the Chinese have looked down on the Tibetans as objects of slavery and oppression and intentionally deprived them of the precious opportunities for proper education. Now under the pretext that Tibetans are not competent large numbers of Chinese, mainly under the guise of skilled labour, are being

brought into the major towns of central Tibet. Especially in parts of Amdo and Kham, large numbers of Chinese are continually setting up agricultural settlements in the more fertile areas and places where there are better facilities. The native inhabitants, the Tibetans, are being pushed away to remote areas and being forced to live as nomads.

No matter how convincing the temporary 'nationalities policy' may appear, it will be extremely regrettable and dangerous if the very basis of a distinct culture-the people-are made to disappear without a trace. Similarly, while they say that they are improving the schools in Tibet, the Chinese are taking to China many young Tibetan children on the ground that there are better facilities there. Here, too, there is the danger that eventually these children will forget their way of thinking and living. The parents and the children themselves must make every effort to remember and preserve their distinctive traditions wherever they are. All of us must take serious note of these dangerous developments.

I would also like to add a word of caution about the new Chinese economic policy for Tibet. Apart from liberalizing the economic system in Tibet, since 1980, China has recently invited foreign capital investment in Tibet. This is welcome, if it will lead to an improvement in the standard of living of the common Tibetans. But for the last 27 years there has been a systematic exploitation of Tibet's natural resources. More than anything else, Tibet was made the source of raw material for the economic development of China. If the present trend continues and also if the Chinese hastily and haphazardly plan the economic development of Tibet to meet their overall modernization target without taking into consideration the conditions of the country and the needs of the people, there is the danger that not only economic chaos but ecological disaster will befall Tibet.

I also welcome the Tibetan language publications on various subjects of Tibetan learning and history. Nevertheless, many of the important facts published are distorted, biased and inaccurate. This is because of lack of freedom and the need to seek the final approval from the Chinese. We must take note of these and ensure that they do not occur in the future and at the same time make concerted efforts to rectify these from every corner.

For a few years it has been possible for Tibetans in Tibet to visit Tibetans in exile and *vice versa*. This has enabled many Tibetans to see their family members and friends about whom for many years they had not even heard, leave alone meet. This has been of great benefit to all concerned. The Tibetans in exile availed of the opportunity to visit Tibet purely on humanitarian grounds. Their visits are in no way an indication of their acceptance of the Chinese occupation of Tibet or of their being satisfied with the present conditions inside Tibet. Therefore, if political capital is made out of such a purely humanitarian action it will not serve any purpose.

With prayers for the well-being of all sentient beings.

The Dalai Lama
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