Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama
10 March 1988

Today, as we commemorate the twenty-ninth anniversary of our National Uprising against the Chinese occupation, we remember over a million of our compatriots who have given their lives for the cause.

In past months our country has been undergoing the most severe repression since the so-called Cultural Revolution. At least thirty-two people have died during the unrest in Lhasa and hundreds have been arrested, beaten and tortured. Throughout Tibet, additional security forces have been brought in, freedom of movement has now been restricted, and Chinese authorities continue to violate the people's fundamental human rights. Today, we also honour the courage of our brethren in Tibet who have taken to the streets to draw attention to their suffering under Chinese colonial rule.

The current unrest in Tibet is not an isolated event. There have been numerous demonstrations in our country since the crushing by Chinese troops of the National Uprising in 1959. It is unique only in that it was witnessed by the foreign press and tourists and was, therefore, widely reported.

The struggle of our people is, unlike many, a non-violent one. This may have made it more difficult to convince the world of the depth of our misery and the earnestness of our resolve. It may even have encouraged governments to ignore our just cause. It is indeed a sad reflection of the state of the world that violence seems to be required for the international community to pay attention. Given the global concern for terrorism and other forms of violence, would it not be in everyone's interest to support the non-violent pursuit of just causes?

I have always felt that violence breeds violence. It contributes little to the resolution of conflicts. I, therefore, renew my appeal to all freedom-loving peoples to support our non-violent struggle for the survival of our national identity, our culture and our spiritual tradition, and to persuade the Chinese government to abandon its oppressive policies.

Today, Tibet's very existence is under threat. The massive transfer of Chinese onto the Tibetan plateau jeopardizes 2,100 years of Tibet's distinct history and identity and is the immediate cause of our people's renewed determination to openly express, even at the cost of their lives, their dissatisfaction. Not only does China's present policy contravene the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, which forbids the transfer of civilians onto occupied territory — regardless of disputed claims to sovereignty — it also violates the most fundamental right of a people to survive and be masters of their destiny in their own land. It is my hope that the new leaders of China will see the futility and injustice of attempting to force their dominion on an unwilling people.

Tibet should be for the six million Tibetans. Its future, including its form of government and social system, should be for the Tibetan people themselves to decide. No Tibetan is interested in restoring outdated political and social institutions. As I have said many

times, even the continuation of the institution of the Dalai Lama is for the people to decide. Respect for freedom and democracy is essential for the development of modern Tibet and its people.

Those of us in exile have been fortunate to live in free societies and to learn from these countries the value of freedom and democracy. It is our responsibility as free citizens to exercise the rights we possess in the furtherance of our cause. In 1963 I promulgated the democratic Constitution of Tibet and for the past twenty-five years our exiled community has, under difficult circumstances, responded well to the challenge and experiment of democracy. We can be especially proud of the many younger people who are taking the lead in all fields of our society, including the administration of government, our extensive social services and the free press. Yet, we must work harder to make our institutions more effective and more democratic.

Whether the Constitution of Tibet can be totally implemented or not can be determined only when all Tibetans have been given the opportunity to accept or reject it. Nonetheless, the Tibetan people must do their utmost to give it life, to the extent this is possible, in exile. Thus when elections to our parliament-in-exile, the Assembly of Tibetan People's Deputies, are once again held in July this year, the people must take their right to vote seriously and choose the candidates who best represent their interests. It is not good to rely on me for all major decisions. It is for the Tibetan people to assume that responsibility.

Let us, in the coming year, increase our efforts to create a truly free and democratic Tibet, not only in exile, but, more importantly, in our sacred country. The great sympathy and support which the international community has shown in the past year has renewed our hope for a better future. The heroism of our brothers and sisters in Tibet, non-violently opposing a large and brutal force is a constant inspiration. It is a living testament to the oneness of our Buddhist heritage and our national spirit. May that immutable spirit and our people's undaunted courage together strengthen the resolve of all six million Tibetans, in and outside Tibet. May every one of us, in this coming year, give his or her greatest effort towards the achievement of our just and noble cause: a Tibet for Tibetans.

My prayers for the welfare of all sentient beings.

The Dalai Lama
10 March 1988