

Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama 10th March 1991

Two days ago, on March 8, special prayers were held for all those brave Tibetans who sacrificed their lives for the Tibetan cause and for those who continue to demonstrate for freedom throughout Tibet. This is the day when martial law was declared in Tibet two years ago. We especially remember young Lhakpa Tsering, who was tortured to death in prison recently, and Lobsang Tenzin and others who are reportedly in imminent danger of being executed any day.

I hope that March 8 will be commemorated annually as a day of remembrance and prayer for all those who are being arrested, tortured and executed in Tibet, and for the family members of these victims who also suffer. Today, on this thirty-second commemoration of the March 10, 1959 National Uprising, we remember these brave Tibetans once again. In Tibet, the situation remains grim. On May 1 last year Chinese authorities announced the lifting of martial law in Tibet. However, there is clear evidence to conclude that the lifting of martial law is in name only. The People's Armed Police, which was withdrawn, has been replaced by thousands of plainclothes policemen. If the situation is normal, as the Chinese claim, then they should immediately withdraw all the plainclothes policemen and let Lhasa be run by civilian authorities. Before the lifting of martial law, several hundred monks and nuns were expelled from various monasteries and nunneries in Tibet. Unfortunately, some of the most intelligent and serious practitioners of Buddhism have been expelled from these institutions.

After the July visit of Jiang Zemin, General Secretary of the Communist Party to Tibet, more stringent measures were ordered to suppress all activities of the Tibetans in Lhasa which the Chinese perceive as being political. They have officially declared that "heavy" and "firm punishments" should be meted out "swiftly".

In spite of all this, the spirit of the Tibetan people remains unbroken and they have continued to demonstrate at least half a dozen times for the freedom of Tibet. My deep concern for the unending cycle of repression and the massive influx of Chinese into Tibet, thus endangering the very survival of our people and culture, led me to initiate two important proposals with the Chinese: my Five Point Peace Plan in 1987 and the Strasbourg Proposal in 1988.

The Strasbourg Proposal was made with a conviction that they met with the basic hopes of the Tibetan people without denying the reality of present day Chinese rule in Tibet. Many Tibetans have been disappointed and many have criticized these proposals as too conciliatory with unwarranted concessions.

My proposals have not elicited any official response from the Chinese leadership. In fact their state media has been critical. Because of this closed and negative attitude, I feel my personal commitment to these ideas has become ineffectual. I believe that the logical step is to acknowledge our failure in this endeavour to reach out to the Chinese leadership. If in the near future there are no new initiatives from the Chinese I will consider myself free

of any obligation to the proposal I made in the Strasbourg address.¹ However, my dedication to the freedom and legitimate rights of the Tibetan people will always remain steadfast. I also remain committed to negotiations with the Chinese for a peaceful solution to the Tibetan problem.

Last year, many positive and far-reaching changes took place in the world. In the Soviet Union, the steps taken by President Gorbachev to introduce a more representative and responsible form of government had significant and widespread impact. In many countries, in Eastern Europe especially, one-party dictatorships were replaced by popularly elected governments. The dismantling of the Berlin Wall and the unification of the two Germanys are testimonies to the end of the Cold War and a step towards a world no longer haunted by the prospect of a war between the East and the West.

In Mongolia too the people went to the polls to elect a new government. I particularly welcome the revival of Buddhism in Mongolia, which had uniquely close cultural and religious ties with Tibet. In our part of the world, I must commend the people of Nepal for their efforts in reviving a multi-party system and His Majesty King Birendra for facilitating the process. Regrettably in many other countries, such as Burma, although the people speak out loudly for greater freedom, the governments have not responded positively.

With such fundamental shifts taking place in the world, I am confident that China cannot remain isolated and unchanging. The Chinese people will one day see that only through a genuinely democratic form of government will they be able to unleash their creative energies for the good of China, and for peace and progress in the world. Signs of this change are evident. The crushing of the democratic movement, led by students and intellectuals, in June 1989 in Beijing, may have been a temporary set-back. However, in the long run, this event will give the Chinese people inspiration to continue their struggle for greater freedom and democracy.

A peaceful and politically stable future for China lies not just in the success of the Chinese democratic movement, but in the fulfillment of the wishes of millions of non-Chinese to regain their own freedom from Chinese occupation. For stability and peace to return to Asia as a whole, a new China should join a democratic community of states created for the mutual benefit of all its members. Such a community could include Tibet, East Turkestan, and Inner Mongolia who seek freedom from Chinese colonialist rule, and could also be extended to include other nations interested in building an Asian community. The idea needs much detailed thought and I hope other Asian leaders and interested persons will be willing to discuss it with me so that we can make it a reality.

I was very saddened by the recent Gulf War and the loss of so many human lives. I consider this crisis an exception in an otherwise encouraging atmosphere. Too often situations that turn explosive are a result of neglect at the early stages when diplomacy and peaceful methods are not adequately applied. A contributing factor to such hostilities is the "strategies" many nations adopt in an attempt to achieve a balance of power that is supposedly in their interest.

The worst contributing factor to conflicts such as the Gulf War is the arms trade which individuals and nations indulge in for financial gain. Such trade seems senseless, irresponsible and completely lacking in human considerations. If we want to avoid such tragic confrontations we must pay greater attention to situations of potential conflict right from the beginning. We must change our limited selfish strategies and interests and strive for a greater sense of responsibility beyond one's immediate area. Such a concept will not only preserve peace for one particular nation but will lay the foundation for a lasting peace for all.

Ever since I was young, I looked forward to the time when we could devise a political system suited both to our traditions and the demands of the modern world. Since we came into exile we have tried to build up the *Chithu*, the elected assembly of representatives, as a key feature of our effort to develop such a system. We are now embarking on changes which will further democratize and strengthen our administration in exile. I hope that these changes will allow the people of Tibet to have a clear say in determining the future of their country.

It is therefore a matter of great pride for me, and I am sure for all of you, that last month the Tibetan exiles went to the polls for the eleventh time to elect a new assembly of representatives. This assembly will have many more members and will have a much greater role in determining the executive branch of our administration. Already, since the special congress held last May, the members of the Kashag, the executive head of our administration, are elected officials, no longer appointed by me.

I believe that future generations of Tibetans will consider these changes among the most important achievements of our experience in exile. Just as the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet cemented our nation, I am confident that the democratization of our society will add to the vitality of the Tibetan people and enable our decision-making institutions to reflect the heartfelt needs and aspirations of all Tibetans.

During the last few years, I have been most encouraged by the expression of support for the Tibetan cause both at the government and individual level throughout the world. In recent years the U.S. Congress and several parliaments in Europe, and in Australia, have adopted resolutions of concern and support for Tibet and the Tibetan people. The Friends of Tibet meeting in Dharamsala last March was another encouraging indication of the extent of that support.

Today, this national day has also been declared the first day of the International Year of Tibet 1991-1992, a year long commemoration of Tibet, its people and its cultural heritage. On behalf of all of us, I thank each of you involved in the numerous exhibitions, conferences, seminars, and publications and other events and projects dedicated to this global educational effort.

In conclusion, I want to once again thank the voluntary agencies and individuals still involved in assisting the Tibetan refugee community. A special note of gratitude must be

extended to the people and government of India for their hospitality and understanding all these years, in spite of the many problems and responsibilities of their own.

The Dalai Lama
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