

Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama 10th March 1995

The world is today undergoing major changes. While there is a spirit of reconciliation and peace emerging in many troubled parts of the world, unfortunately new conflicts are also breaking out. We have endeavoured to find a peaceful resolution to the Tibetan issue and hoped that positive changes would also come to Tibet. But, as we commemorate the 36th anniversary of our people's uprising, I must state with sadness that little has changed in our homeland and our people continue to suffer. In fact, the Chinese government has intensified its repression in Tibet. Recent Chinese policies demonstrate more clearly than ever their intention to resolve the question of Tibet through force, intimidation and population transfer.

The Chinese authorities have lately adopted a series of new measures to tighten political control in Tibet. Under a programme of "investigation and scrutiny" tighter security measures were imposed and a new crackdown on advocates of human rights and independence has been launched. Victims of this new political persecution include Tibetans who work for the preservation of Tibetan culture, which includes teaching the Tibetan language and opening private schools. Tibetan cadres and members of the Chinese Communist Party are made to undergo political re-education, reminiscent of the days of the Cultural Revolution. Those suspected of harbouring religious and national feelings are being purged. Monasteries have been raided by the People's Armed police and the chain of political arrests has been extended to rural areas. The rebuilding and construction of new monasteries has been prohibited and the admission of new monks and nuns stopped. Tibetan travel agents and tourist guides have been dismissed in order to control the flow of information and Tibetan children are no longer permitted to study abroad. Those who are presently studying abroad have been ordered to return.

At a high-level meeting in Beijing last July these policies were sanctioned and 62 new "economic development projects" in Tibet were announced. As in the past, these projects are designed primarily to increase the immigration of Chinese into Tibet and ultimately drown the Tibetans in a sea of Chinese. Similarly, China's proclaimed intention to build a railway to Central Tibet is particularly alarming. Under the present circumstances this will enable a dramatic acceleration of China's population transfer policy. We only need to look at the large influx of Chinese who are arriving by train every week in different parts of Eastern Turkistan to understand the impact such a railway will have on the survival of the Tibetan people with its unique cultural heritage.

Over the past 15 years, I have tried to resolve the Tibet-China problem in a spirit of genuine friendship and co-operation, discarding any feelings of enmity towards the Chinese. I have consistently and sincerely made attempts to engage the Chinese government in earnest negotiations over the future of Tibet. Regrettably China has rejected my proposals for a negotiated resolution of our problem. Instead she has set the pre-condition that I formally recognise Tibet to be "an inseparable part of China" before any negotiations can start. The true nature of the historical relationship of Tibet and China is best left for Tibetan and Chinese historians to study objectively. I also encourage other schools, as well as international jurists and their institutions, to study the history of Tibet and draw their unbiased conclusions.

In the past I have deliberately restrained myself from emphasising the historical and legal status of Tibet. It is my belief that it is more important to look forward to the future than dwell in the past. Theoretically speaking it is not impossible that the six million Tibetans could benefit from joining the one billion Chinese of their own free will, if a relationship based on equality, mutual benefit and mutual respect could be established. If China wants Tibet to stay with China, then she must create the necessary conditions. However, the reality today is that Tibet is an occupied country under colonial rule. This is the essential issue which must be addressed and resolved through negotiations.

In the past few years our cause has gained increasing international importance and support. This is reflected in the United Nation's debates on the situation in Tibet, in the General Assembly's Third Committee, in the Commission for Human Rights, and in the reports of the United Nations' Rapporteurs. Last year I appealed to the international community for help in facilitating negotiations between my representatives and the Chinese government. A number of Asian and Western governments have supported my call for negotiations publicly and through diplomatic channels and have offered their good offices to bring them about. I take this opportunity to thank these governments for their support. It is important that the international community, and especially democratic countries, continue to send a clear message to China that their behaviour in Tibet is deplorable and that the question of Tibet must be resolved through peaceful negotiations without pre-conditions. The need to make real progress in resolving the problem of Tibet is urgent. The present lack of progress increases the danger of violent conflicts breaking out in Tibet.

Many Tibetans have voiced unprecedented criticism of my suggestion that we should compromise on the issue of total independence. Moreover, the failure of the Chinese government to respond positively to my conciliatory proposals has deepened the sense of impatience and frustration among my people. Therefore, I proposed last year that this issue be submitted to a referendum. However, as long as I lead our freedom struggle, there will be no deviation from the path of non- violence.

The referendum should seek to clarify the political course of our struggle. A thorough and honest discussion on the various options open to us must take place among the Tibetan people. I hope that this historic exercise will be carried out carefully and thoroughly. I realise that under the present conditions it would be impossible to hold a fair referendum inside Tibet. Nevertheless, we will be able to find ways to collect representative opinions from different parts of Tibet and to conduct the plebiscite among our exiled community.

While we prepare ourselves for this referendum, I also wish to state that I remain open to any Chinese overtures for negotiations. I am still committed to the spirit of my "middle way" approach, and I am hopeful that continued international efforts to persuade the Chinese government to enter into negotiations with us may eventually yield tangible results. Our negotiating team remains ready to resume talks any time at a mutually agreeable venue. Sooner or later, a flexible and open-minded Chinese leadership must realise the wisdom of resolving the issue of Tibet through negotiations in a spirit of reconciliation and compromise. This is the only proper way to ensure stability, which the Chinese leadership assert, is their primary concern. However, true stability must be based on the mutual trust, consent and benefit of all concerned, not on the use of force.

Tibet's geographic position in the heart of Asia gives it enormous strategic importance. For centuries Tibet acted as a buffer ensuring peace in the region. The implications of China's presence in Tibet go

well beyond Tibet's borders. Over the last more than forty years Tibet has undergone an unprecedented militarisation. Coupled with the increased transfer of Chinese population into Tibet, this has changed the peaceful character of the Tibetan plateau. If this alarming trend continues, it will not only threaten the survival of the Tibetan people and their culture, but will have serious repercussions for the region as a whole.

Tibet's spiritual and cultural traditions have contributed to peace in Asia. Buddhism not only turned Tibetans into a peace loving nation following a period of great military might, but also spread from the Himalayas to Mongolia and other places in Central Asia and provided millions of people with a spiritual foundation of peace and tolerance. Buddhism is not alien to China, and I strongly believe that Buddhism can be of great service in providing spiritual values, peace of mind, contentment and self-discipline to millions of Chinese in the future.

With the occupation of Tibet, Tibetan Buddhism has been robbed of its cradle and homeland, not only violating the Tibetan people's right to freedom of religion but also endangering the very survival of this spiritual and cultural tradition in Tibet and Central Asia. This is particularly true of China's policy of cutting Tibet up into many separate administrative units, most of which have been incorporated into neighbouring Chinese provinces. Historically, the contribution of Tibetans from these areas to Tibet's cultural and spiritual heritage has been immense. But as tiny minorities in Chinese provinces it will be very difficult for these Tibetans to preserve their Buddhist culture and distinct identity in the long term. The Tibetan entities outside the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) comprise a larger portion of the Tibetan area and roughly four of the six million Tibetans. A solution to the question of Tibet cannot be found without all these parts of Tibet being incorporated into one Tibetan entity. This is essential to the survival of Tibetan culture.

Finally, I wish to pay homage to the brave men and women of Tibet, who have died for the cause of our freedom. I pray also for our compatriots who are enduring mental and physical suffering in Chinese prisons at this moment. Not one day passes without my fervent prayers for an early end to the suffering of our people. I believe that today the question is not whether Tibet will ever be free, but rather how soon.

With my prayers,

The Dalai Lama
10th March 1995