

Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama

10th March 1996

As we commemorate today the thirty-seventh anniversary of the Tibetan People's uprising, we are witnessing a general hardening of Chinese government policy. This is reflected in an increasingly aggressive posture towards the peoples of Taiwan and Hong Kong and in intensified repression in Tibet. We also see rising fear and suspicion throughout the Asia-Pacific region and a worsening of relations between China and much of the rest of the world.

Within the context of this tense political atmosphere, Beijing has once again sought to impose its will on the Tibetan people by appointing a rival Panchen Lama. In doing so, it has chosen a course of total disregard both for the sentiments of the Tibetans in general and for Tibetan spiritual tradition in particular, despite my every effort to reach for some form of understanding and cooperation with the Chinese government. Significantly, the official Chinese media compares the present political climate in Tibet with that in Poland during the Solidarity years of the 1980's. This demonstrates a growing sense of insecurity on the part of the Chinese leadership as a result of which, through a continuing campaign of coercion and intimidation, Beijing has greatly reinforced its repression throughout Tibet. I am therefore, saddened to have to report that the situation of our people in Tibet continues to deteriorate.

Nevertheless, it remains my strong conviction that change for the better is coming. China is at a critical juncture: its society is undergoing profound changes and the country's leadership is facing the transition to a new generation. It is obvious too that the Tiananmen massacre has failed to silence the call for freedom, democracy and human rights in China. Moreover, the impressive democratisation in process across the Taiwan Strait must further invigorate the democratic aspirations of the Chinese people. Indeed, Taiwan's historic first direct presidential elections later this month are certain to have an immense political and psychological impact on their minds. A transformation from the current totalitarian regime in Beijing into one which is more open, free and democratic is thus inevitable. The only outstanding question is how and when and whether the transition will be a smooth one.

As a human being, it is my sincere desire that our Chinese brothers and sisters enjoy freedom, democracy, prosperity and stability. As a Buddhist monk, I am of course concerned that a country which is home to almost a quarter of the world's entire population and which is on the brink of an epic change, should undergo that change peacefully. In view of China's huge population, chaos and instability could lead to large scale bloodshed and tremendous suffering for millions of people. Such a situation would also have serious ramifications for peace and stability throughout the world. As a Tibetan, I recognize that the future of our country and our people depends to a great extent on what happens in China during the years ahead.

Whether the coming change in China brings new life and new hope for Tibet and whether China herself emerges as a reliable, peaceful and constructive member of the

international community depends to a large degree on the extent to which the international community itself adopts responsible policies towards China. I have always drawn attention to the need to bring Beijing into the mainstream of world democracy and have spoken against any ideas of isolating and containing China. To attempt to do so would be morally incorrect and politically impractical. Instead, I have always counselled a policy of responsible and principled engagement with the Chinese leadership.

It became obvious during the Tiananmen movement that the Chinese people yearn for freedom, democracy, equality and human rights no less than any other people. Moreover, I was personally very moved to see that those young people, despite being taught, “political power comes out of the barrel of a gun” pursued their aims without resorting to violence. I, too, am convinced that non-violence is the appropriate way to bring about constructive political change.

Based on my belief in non-violence and in dialogue, I have consistently tried to engage the Chinese government in serious negotiations concerning the future of the Tibetan people. In order to find a mutually acceptable solution, I have adopted a ‘middle-way’ approach. This is also in response to, and within the framework of, Mr. Deng's stated assurance that “anything except independence can be discussed and resolved”. Unfortunately, the Chinese government's response to my many overtures has been consistently negative. But I remain confident that his successor will realize the wisdom of resolving the problem of Tibet through dialogue.

The Tibet issue will neither go away of its own accord, nor can it be wished away. As the past has clearly shown, neither intimidation nor coercion of the Tibetan people can force a solution. Sooner or later, the leadership in Beijing will have to face this fact. Actually, the Tibet problem represents an opportunity for China. If it were solved properly through negotiation, not only would it be helpful in creating a political atmosphere conducive to the smooth transition of China into a new era but also China's image throughout the world would be greatly enhanced. A properly negotiated settlement would furthermore have a strong, positive impact on the peoples of Hong Kong and Taiwan and will do much to improve Sino-Indian relations by inspiring genuine trust and confidence.

For our part, we seek to resolve the issue of Tibet in a spirit of reconciliation, compromise and understanding. I am fully committed to the spirit of the ‘middle-way approach’. We wish to establish a sustainable relationship with China based on mutual respect, mutual benefit and friendship. In doing so, we will think not only about the fundamental interests of the Tibetan people, but also take seriously the consideration of China's security concerns and her economic interests. Moreover, if our Buddhist culture can flourish once again in Tibet, we are confident of being able to make a significant contribution to millions of our Chinese brothers and sisters by sharing with them those spiritual moral values which are so clearly lacking in China today.

Despite the absence of positive and conciliatory gesture from the Chinese government to my initiatives, I have always encouraged Tibetans to develop personal relationship with Chinese. I make it a point to ask the Tibetans to distinguish between the Chinese people

and the policies of the totalitarian government in Beijing. I am thus happy to observe that there has been significant progress in our effort to foster closer interaction amongst the people of our two communities, mainly between exile Tibetans and Chinese living abroad. Moreover, human rights activists and democrats within China, people like the brave Wei Jingsheng, are urging their leaders to respect the basic human rights of the Tibetan people and pledging their support for our right to self-rule. Chinese scholars outside China are discussing a constitution for a federated China, which envisages a confederal status for Tibet. These are most encouraging and inspiring developments. I am, therefore, very pleased that the people-to-people dialogue between the Tibetans and Chinese is fostering a better understanding of our mutual concerns and interests.

In recent years we have also witnessed the growth of a worldwide grassroots movement in support of our non-violence struggle for freedom. Reflecting this, many government and parliaments have come forward with strong expressions of concern and support for our efforts. Notwithstanding the immediate negative reactions of the Chinese regime, I strongly believe that such expressions of international support are essential. They are vital in communicating a sense of urgency to the minds of leadership in Beijing and in helping persuade them to negotiate.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the numerous individuals, also the members of governments, of parliaments, of non-governmental organizations and of religious orders who have supported my appeal for the safety and freedom of the young Panchen Lama, Gendhun Choekyi Nyima. I am grateful for their continued intervention and efforts on behalf of this child who must be the world's youngest political prisoner. I also wish to thank our supporters all over the world who are commemorating today's anniversary of the Tibetan people's uprising with peaceful activities in every part of the globe. I urge the Chinese government not to construe such support for Tibet as anti-Chinese. The purpose and aim of these activities is to appeal to the Chinese leadership and people to recognize the legitimate rights of the Tibetan people.

In conclusion, I am happy to state that our exile community's experiment in democracy is progressing well without any major setbacks or difficulties. Last autumn, the Tibetans in exile participated in preliminary polls to nominate candidates for the twelfth Assembly of the Tibetan People's Deputies, the Parliament-in-Exile. Next month, they return to the polls to elect the members themselves. This accords with my conviction that democracy is the best guarantee for the survival and future of the Tibetan people. Democracy entails responsibilities as well as rights. The success of our struggle for freedom will therefore depend directly on our ability to shoulder these collectively. It is thus my hope that the twelfth Assembly will emerge as a united, mature and dedicated representative of our people. This will ultimately depend on every franchised member of our community. Each one is called upon to cast his or her vote with an informed and unbiased mind, with a clear awareness of the need of the hour and with strong sense of individual responsibility.

With my homage to the brave men and women of Tibet, who have died for the cause of our freedom, I pray for an early to the suffering of our people.

The Dalai Lama
March 10, 1996