

## **Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama 10th March 1998**

Great changes are taking place all over the world at the dawn of a new millennium. While there are instances of new conflicts breaking out, it is encouraging that we are also able to witness the emergence of a spirit of dialogue and reconciliation in many troubled parts of the world. In some ways, this twentieth century could be called a century of war and bloodshed. It is my belief that humanity in general has drawn lessons from the experiences gained during this century. As a result, I believe the human community has become more mature. There is, therefore, hope that with determination and dedication we can make the next century a century of dialogue and non-violent conflict resolution.

Today, as we commemorate the thirty-ninth anniversary of our freedom struggle, I wish to express my sincere appreciation and great respect for the resilience and patience shown by the Tibetan people in the face of tremendous odds. The current situation in Tibet and the lack of any substantive progress in resolving the Tibetan problem is no doubt causing an increasing sense of frustration among many Tibetans. I am concerned that some might feel compelled to look for avenues other than peaceful resolutions. While I understand their predicament, I wish to firmly reiterate once again the importance of abiding by the non-violent course of our freedom struggle. The path of non-violence must remain a matter of principle in our long and difficult quest for freedom. It is my firm belief that this approach is the most beneficial and practical course in the long run. Our peaceful struggle until now has gained us the sympathy and admiration of the international community. Through our non-violent freedom struggle we are also setting an example and thus contributing to the promotion of a global political culture of non-violence and dialogue.

The sweeping changes across the globe have also embraced China. The reforms, initiated by Deng Xiaoping, have altered not only the Chinese economy, but also the political system, making it less ideological, less reliant on mass mobilisation, less coercive, and less stifling for the average citizen. The government is also notably far less centralised. Moreover, the post-Deng Xiaoping leadership in China seems to have become more flexible in its international policy. One indication of this is China's greater participation in international fora and cooperation with international organisations and agencies. A remarkable development and achievement has been the smooth transfer of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty last year and Beijing's subsequent pragmatic and flexible handling of issues concerning Hong Kong. Also recent statements from Beijing on restarting cross-strait negotiations with Taiwan reflect apparent flexibility and softening of its stance. In short, there is no doubt that China today is a better place to live in than 15 or 20 years ago. These are historic changes that are commendable. However, China continues to face grave human rights problems and other formidable challenges. It is my hope that the new leadership in China, with this renewed confidence, will have the foresight and courage to provide greater freedom to the Chinese people. History teaches us that material progress and comfort alone are not the full answer to the needs and yearnings of any human society.

In stark contrast to these positive aspects of the development in China proper, the situation in Tibet has sadly worsened in recent years. Of late, it has become apparent that Beijing is carrying out what amounts to a deliberate policy of cultural genocide in Tibet. The infamous "strike hard" campaign against Tibetan religion and nationalism has intensified with each passing year. This campaign of repression - initially confined to monasteries and nunneries - has now been extended to cover all parts of the Tibetan society. In some spheres of life in Tibet, we are witnessing the return of an atmosphere of intimidation, coercion and fear, reminiscent of the days of the Cultural Revolution.

In Tibet human rights violations continue to be wide-spread. These abuses of rights have a distinct character, and are aimed at preventing Tibetans as a people from asserting their own identity and culture and their wish to preserve it. This Buddhist culture inspires the Tibetan people with values and concepts of love and compassion that are of practical benefit and relevance in daily life and hence the wish to preserve it. Thus, human rights violations in Tibet are often the result of policies of racial and cultural discrimination and are only the symptoms and consequences of a deeper problem. Therefore, despite some economic progress in Tibet, the human rights situation has not improved. It is only by addressing the fundamental issue of Tibet that the human rights problems can be overcome.

It is an obvious fact that the sad state of affairs in Tibet is of no benefit at all either to Tibet or to China. To continue along the present path does nothing to alleviate the suffering of the Tibetan people, nor does it bring stability and unity to China, which are of overriding importance to the leadership in Beijing. Also, one of the main concerns of the Chinese leadership has been to improve its international image and standing. However, its inability to resolve the Tibetan problem peacefully has been tarnishing the international image and reputation of China. I believe a solution to the Tibetan issue would have far reaching positive implications for China's image in the world, including in its dealings with Hong Kong and Taiwan.

With regard to a mutually-acceptable solution to the issue of Tibet, my position is very straightforward. I am not seeking independence. As I have said many time before, what I am seeking is for the Tibetan problem to be given the opportunity to have genuine self-rule in order to preserve their civilization and for the unique Tibetan culture, religion, language and way of life to grow and thrive. My main concern is to ensure the survival of the Tibetan people with their own unique Buddhist cultural heritage. For this, it is essential, as the past decades have shown clearly, that the Tibetans be able to handle all their domestic affairs and to freely determine their social, economic and cultural development. I do not believe that the Chinese leadership would have any fundamental objections to this. Successive Chinese leaderships have always assured that the Chinese presence in Tibet is to work for the welfare of the Tibetans and to 'help develop' Tibet. Therefore, given a political will, there is no reason why the Chinese leadership cannot start addressing the issue of Tibet by entering into a dialogue with us. This is the only proper way to ensure stability and unity, which the Chinese leadership asserts are their primary concern.

I take this opportunity to once again urge the Chinese leadership to give serious and substantive considerations to my suggestions. It is my firm belief that dialogue and a willingness to look with honesty and clarity at the reality of Tibet can lead us to a viable solution. It is time for all of us to 'seek truth from facts' and to learn lessons derived from a calm and objective study of the past and to act with courage, vision and wisdom.

The negotiations must aim to establish a relationship between the Tibetan and Chinese peoples based on friendship and mutual benefit; to ensure stability and unity; and to empower the Tibetan people to exercise genuine self-rule with freedom and democracy, thus allowing them to preserve and cultivate their unique culture as well as to protect the delicate environment of the Tibetan plateau. These are the principal issues. However, the Chinese government is making consistent efforts to confuse the real issues at stake. They allege that our efforts are aimed at the restoration of Tibet's old social system and the status and privileges of the Dalai Lama. As far as the institution of the Dalai Lama is concerned, I stated publicly as early as 1969 that it is for the people of Tibet to decide whether this institution is to continue or not. In my own case, I made it clear in a formal public statement in 1992 that when we return to Tibet, I will hold no positions in any future Tibetan government. Moreover, no Tibetan, whether in exile or within Tibet, has a desire of restoring Tibet's old social order. It is, therefore, disappointing that the Chinese government continues to indulge in such baseless and distorted propaganda. This is not helpful in creating a conducive atmosphere for dialogue, and I hope that Beijing will refrain from making such allegations.

I also would like to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to the many governments, parliaments, non-governmental organisations, Tibet support groups and individuals, who continue to be deeply concerned with the repression in Tibet and urge to resolve the question of Tibet through peaceful negotiations. The United States has set a precedence of appointing a Special Coordinator for Tibetan affairs in order to facilitate dialogue between us Tibetans and the Chinese government. The European and Australian parliaments have recommended similar initiatives. Last December, the International Commission of Jurists issued its third report on Tibet, entitled, *Tibet: Human Rights and the Rule of Law*. These are timely initiatives and most encouraging developments. Moreover, the growing empathy, support and solidarity from our Chinese brothers and sisters in China as well as those overseas for the fundamental rights of the Tibetan people and for my "Middle-Way Approach" are of particular inspiration and a source of great encouragement for us Tibetans.

Furthermore, on this occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of India's independence I wish to express on behalf of the Tibetan people our hearty congratulations and reiterate our immense appreciation and gratitude to the people and government of India, which has become a second home to the majority of the Tibetans in exile. India represents not only a safe haven for us Tibetan refugees, but is also for us a country whose ancient philosophy of *Ahimsa* and deep-rooted democratic tradition have inspired and shaped our values and aspirations. Moreover, I believe India can and should play a conducive and influential role in resolving the Tibetan problem peacefully. My "Middle-Way Approach" is in line with the basic Indian policy vis-à-vis Tibet and China. There is no reason why

India should not be actively engaged in encouraging and promoting dialogues between Tibetans and the Chinese government. It is clear that without peace and stability on the Tibetan plateau, it is unrealistic to believe that genuine trust and confidence can be restored in the Sino-Indian relationship.

Last year we conducted an opinion poll of the Tibetans in exile and collected suggestions from Tibet wherever possible on the proposed referendum, by which the Tibetan people were to determine the future course of our freedom struggle to their full satisfaction. Based on the outcome of this poll and suggestions from Tibet, the Assembly of Tibetan People's Deputies, our parliament-in-exile, passed a resolution empowering me to continue to use my discretion on the matter without seeking recourse to a referendum. I wish to thank the people of Tibet for the tremendous trust, confidence and hope they place in me. I continue to believe that my "Middle-Way Approach" is the most realistic and pragmatic course to resolve the issue of Tibet peacefully. This approach meets the vital needs of the Tibetan people while ensuring the unity and stability of the People's Republic of China. I will, therefore, continue to pursue this course of approach with full commitment and make earnest efforts to reach out to the Chinese leadership.

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 end to the suffering of our people and for peace and welfare of all sentient beings.

The Dalai Lama  
10th March 1998