

**Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the Fortieth Anniversary
of the Tibetan National Uprising Day
10th March 1999**

My sincere greetings to my compatriots in Tibet as well as in exile and to all our friends and supporters all over the world on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Tibetan national uprising of 1959.

Four decades have passed since we came into exile and continued our struggle for freedom both in and outside Tibet. Four decades are a considerable time in a person's life. Many fellow countrymen, both those who stayed back in Tibet in 1959 and those who came out at that time, are now gone. Today, the second and third generations of Tibetans are shouldering the responsibility of our freedom struggle with undiminished determination and indomitable spirit.

During our four decades of life in exile, the Tibetan community has gone through a process of increasing democratisation and has made tremendous progress in education. We have also been able to preserve and promote our unique cultural and religious heritage. Our achievement on all these fronts is now widely recognized and acknowledged by the international community. The credit for this achievement goes to the determination and hard work of the Tibetan people. However, our success would not have been possible without the generous assistance of many international aid organizations and individuals. We are especially grateful to the people and government of India for their unsurpassed generosity and hospitality ever since the late Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru gave asylum to the Tibetan refugees and laid down the programmes for education and rehabilitation of our exile community.

During the same four decades, Tibet has been under the complete control of the government of the People's Republic of China and the Chinese authorities have had a free hand in governing our country. The late Panchen Lama's 70,000-character petition of 1962 serves as a telling historical document on the draconian Chinese policies and actions in Tibet. The immense destruction and human suffering during the Cultural Revolution, which followed shortly afterwards, are today known world-wide and I do not wish to dwell on these sad and painful events. In January 1989, a few days before his sudden death, the Panchen Lama further stated that the progress made in Tibet under China could not match the amount of destruction and suffering inflicted on the Tibetan people.

Although some development and economic progress have been made in Tibet, our country continues to face many fundamental problems. In terms of history, culture, religion, way of life and geographical conditions, there are stark differences between Tibet and China. These differences result in grave clashes of values, dissent and distrust. At the sight of the slightest dissent the Chinese authorities react with force and repression resulting in widespread and serious violations of human rights in Tibet. 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 them. 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. The Chinese authorities identify the distinct culture and religion of Tibet as the root cause of Tibetan resentment and dissent. Hence their policies are aimed at decimating this integral core of the Tibetan civilization and identity.

After a half a century of “liberation” the Tibetan issue is still very much alive and remains yet to be resolved. Obviously this situation is of no benefit to anyone, either to Tibet or to China. To continue along this path does nothing to alleviate the suffering of the Tibetan people, nor does it bring stability and unity to China or help in enhancing China's international image and standing. The only sensible and responsible way to address this problem is dialogue. There is no realistic alternative to it.

It is with this realization that in the early seventies I discussed and decided with my senior officials the main points of my “Middle Way Approach”. Consequently, I opted for a resolution of the Tibet issue, which does not call for the independence of Tibet or its separation from China. I firmly believe that it is possible to find a political solution that ensures the basic rights and freedoms of the Tibetan people within the framework of the People's Republic of the China. My primary concern is the survival and preservation of Tibet's unique spiritual heritage, which is based on compassion and non-violence. And, I believe it is worthwhile and beneficial to preserve this heritage since it continues to remain relevant in our present-day world.

With this spirit I responded immediately when Deng Xiaoping, in late 1978, signalled a willingness to resume dialogue with us. Since then our relation with the Chinese government has taken many twists and turns. Unfortunately, a lack of political will and courage on the part of the Chinese leadership has resulted in their failure to reciprocate my numerous overtures over the years. Thus, our formal contact with the Chinese government came to an end in August 1993. But a few informal channels through private persons and Semi-officials were established after that. During the past one and a half year one informal channel seemed to work smoothly and reliably. In addition, there were some indications that President Jiang personally had taken an interest in the Tibetan issue. When U.S. President Clinton visited China last June, President Jiang discussed Tibet with him at some length. Addressing a joint press conference, President Jiang sought a public clarification from me on two conditions before resuming dialogues and negotiations. We, on our part, communicated to the Chinese government my readiness to respond to President Jiang's statement and our desire for an informal consultation before making it public. Sadly, there was no positive response from the Chinese side.

Late last autumn, without any obvious reason, there was a noticeable hardening of the Chinese position on dialogue and their attitude towards me. This abrupt change was accompanied by a new round of intensified repression in Tibet. This is the current status of our relation with the Chinese government.

It is clear from our experiences of the past decades that formal statements, official rhetoric and political expediency alone will do little to either lessen the suffering of the

concerned people or solve the problem at hand. It is also clear that force can control human beings only physically. It is through reason, fairness and justice alone that the human mind and heart can be won over. What is required is the political will, courage and vision to tackle the root cause of the problem and resolve it once and for all to the satisfaction and benefit of the concerned people. Once we find a mutually acceptable solution to the Tibetan issue, I will not hold any official position, as I have clearly stated for many years.

The root cause of the Tibetan problem is not the difference in ideology, social system or issues resulting from clashes between tradition and modernity. Neither is it just the issue of human rights violations alone. The root of the Tibetan issue lies in Tibet's long, separate history, its distinct and ancient culture, and its unique identity.

Just as in late 1978, so also today, resumption of contact and dialogue is the only sensible and viable way to tackle this complex and grave problem. The atmosphere of deep distrust between Tibetans and Chinese must be overcome. This distrust will not go away in a day. It will dissipate only through face-to-face meetings and sincere dialogues.

I feel that the Chinese leadership is sometimes hindered by its own suspicions so that it is unable to appreciate sincere initiatives from my side, either on the overall solution to the Tibetan problem or on any other matter. A case in point is my consistent and long-standing call for the need to respect the environment situation in Tibet. I have long warned of the consequences of wanton exploitation of the fragile environment on the Tibet Plateau. I did not do this of selfish concern for Tibet. Rather, it has been acutely clear that any ecological imbalance in Tibet would affect not just Tibet, but all the adjacent areas in China and even its neighbouring countries. It is sad and unfortunate that it took last year's devastating floods for the Chinese leadership to realize the need for environment protection. I welcome the moratorium that has been placed on the denudation of forests in Tibetan areas and hope that such measures, belated though they may be, will be followed by more steps to keep Tibet's fragile ecosystem intact.

On my part, I remain committed to the process of dialogue as the means to resolve the Tibetan problem. I do not seek independence for Tibet. I hope that negotiations can begin and that they will provide for genuine autonomy for the Tibetan people and the preservation and promotion of their cultural, religious and linguistic integrity, as well as their socio-economic development. I sincerely believe that my "Middle Way Approach" will contribute to stability and unity of the People's Republic of China and secure the right for the Tibetan people to live in freedom, peace and dignity. A just and fair solution to the issue of Tibet will enable me to give full assurance that I will use my moral authority to persuade the Tibetans not to seek separation.

As a free spokesman for the people of Tibet, I have made every possible effort to engage the Chinese government in negotiations on the future of the Tibetan people. In this endeavour, I am greatly encouraged and inspired by the support we receive from many governments, parliaments, non-governmental organizations and the public throughout the world. I am deeply grateful for their concern and support. I would like to make a special

mention of the efforts being made by President Clinton and his Administration to encourage the Chinese government to engage in dialogues with us. In addition, we are fortunate to continue to enjoy strong bipartisan support in the United State Congress.

The plight of the Tibetan people and our non-violent freedom struggle has touched the hearts and conscience of all people who cherish truth and justice. The international awareness of the issue of Tibet has reached an unprecedented height since last year. Concerns and active support for Tibet are not confined to human rights organizations, governments and parliaments. Universities, schools, religious and social groups, artistic and business communities as well as people from many other walks of life have also come to understand the problem of Tibet and are now expressing their solidarity with our cause. Reflecting this rising popular sentiment, many governments and parliaments have made the problem of Tibet an important issue on the agenda of their relations with the government of China.

We have also been able to deepen and broaden our relations with our Chinese brothers and sisters, belonging to the democracy and human rights movement. Similarly, we have been able to establish cordial and friendly relations with fellow Chinese Buddhists and ordinary Chinese people living abroad and in Taiwan. The support and solidarity that we receive from our Chinese brothers and sisters are a source of great inspiration and hope. I am particularly encouraged and moved by those brave Chinese within China who have urged their government or publicly called for a change in China's policy towards the Tibetan people.

Today, the Tibetan freedom movement is in a much stronger and better position than ever before and I firmly believe that despite the present intransigence of the Chinese government, the prospects for progress in bringing about a meaningful dialogue and negotiations are better today than ever. I, therefore, appeal to governments, parliaments and our friends to continue their support and efforts with renewed dedication and vigour. I strongly believe that such expressions of international concern and support are essential. They are vital in communicating a sense of urgency to the leadership in Beijing and in persuading them to address the issue of Tibet in a serious and constructive manner.

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.

The Dalai Lama
March 10, 1999