

**Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the Forty-Second  
Anniversary of Tibetan National Uprising Day  
10th March 2001**

Over fifty years ago Tibet was occupied by China. It is also over 40 years since 1959, when thousands of Tibetans began their life in exile. Three generations of Tibetans have lived through this darkest period of our history, undergoing tremendous hardship and suffering. Yet the Tibetan issue is still very much alive. Whether the Chinese government admits it or not the world is well aware of the grave problems inside Tibet, not only in the Tibetan Autonomous Region but also in other Tibetan areas. The Late Panchen Lama's 70,000-word petition submitted to the Beijing authorities in 1962 clearly shows how terrible the situation inside Tibet was. Since then, although there have been improvements in some fields, basically the situation still remains serious. Besides being a constant source of international embarrassment to China, the Tibetan problem is also harmful and detrimental to the stability and unity of the People's Republic of China.

The Chinese government continues to whitewash the sad situation in Tibet through propaganda. If conditions inside Tibet are as the Chinese authorities portray it to be why do they not have the courage to allow visitors into Tibet without any restrictions? Instead of attempting to hide things as "state secrets" why do they not have the courage to show the truth to the outside world? And why are there so many security forces and prisons in Tibet? I have always said that if the majority of Tibetans in Tibet were truly satisfied with the state of affairs in Tibet I would have no reason, no justification and no desire to raise my voice against the situation in Tibet. Sadly, whenever Tibetans speak up, instead of listening to them they are arrested, imprisoned and labeled as counter-revolutionaries. They have no opportunity and no freedom to speak out the truth.

If the Tibetans are truly happy the Chinese authorities should have no difficulty in holding a plebiscite in Tibet. Already some Tibetan non-governmental organizations are advocating a referendum in Tibet. They argue that the best way to resolve this issue once and for all is to allow the Tibetans inside Tibet to choose their own destiny through a freely held referendum. They demand to let the Tibetan people speak out and decide for themselves. I have always maintained that ultimately the Tibetan people must be able to decide the future of Tibet. I would in fact whole-heartedly support the result of such a referendum.

The Tibetan struggle is not about my personal position or wellbeing, but about the freedom, basic rights and cultural preservation of six million Tibetans, as well as the protection of the Tibetan environment. As early as in 1969 I made it clear that it is up to the people of Tibet to decide whether the very institution of the Dalai Lama which is over three hundred years old should continue or not. More recently, in a formal policy announcement in 1992 regarding the future polity of Tibet I stated clearly that when we return to Tibet with a certain degree of freedom I would not hold any position in the Tibetan government. I have always believed that in the future Tibet should follow a secular and democratic system of governance. I am certain that no Tibetan, whether in exile or in Tibet, has any desire to restore Tibet's past social order.

I had always been aware that Tibet needed social changes and had embarked on reforms while in Tibet under very difficult political circumstances. After coming into exile I have been encouraging the Tibetans in exile to follow the democratic process. Today, the Tibetan refugees may be among the few communities in exile that have established all the three pillars of democracy-legislature, judiciary and executive. This year this process will be further strengthened with the changes in the election of the chairman of the Tibetan Cabinet, the Kashag. I will be transferring the day-to-day responsibility of running the Tibetan affairs in exile to the elected chairman of the Kashag and the elected parliament in exile. However, I do consider it my moral obligation to the six million Tibetans to continue taking up the Tibetan issue with the Chinese leadership and act as the free spokesman of the Tibetan people until a solution is reached. The tremendous trust placed on me by the Tibetan people increases my strong sense of responsibility.

The historical relationship between Tibet (bod) and China (gya) is, to say the least, much more complex and complicated than the simple official version Beijing upholds. Tibet had been existing as a distinct and separate entity for over two thousand years. There is no denying of this fact. History is history and no one can change the past but accept the facts. I believe that it is best for historians and legal experts to decide the historical status of Tibet. Irrespective of past history, I am looking towards the future.

Successive leaders of the People's Republic of China, from Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai to Deng Xiaoping and Hu Yaobang have repeatedly acknowledged the "unique nature" and "special case" of Tibet's status. The 17-Point Agreement of 1951 between the Tibetans and the Chinese, embodying the original spirit and concept of "one country and two systems", is the best proof of this recognition. No other province or part of the People's Republic of China has any such agreement with Beijing. The Chinese government promised to respect the "unique nature" of Tibet. Despite these assurances, sadly for the most part of its rule, China's oppressive Tibet policies have been misguided by a deep sense of insecurity, distrust, suspicion and arrogance and by a glaring lack of understanding, appreciation and respect for Tibet's distinct culture, history and identity. What is actually "unique" today about Tibet is that it is the poorest and most oppressed area where policies implemented by ultra-leftist elements are still active even though their influences have long been diminishing in China proper.

As a firm believer in non-violence and spirit of reconciliation and co-operation, I have from the beginning consistently sought to prevent bloodshed and to arrive at a peaceful solution. I also have admiration for China and her people with their long history and rich culture. I therefore believe that with courage, vision and wisdom it is possible to establish a relationship between Tibet and China which is of mutual benefit and based on respect and friendship. Consequently, my position regarding the Tibetan freedom struggle has been to seek genuine autonomy for the Tibetan people. In spite of increased accusations against me and the worsening situation in Tibet, I remain committed to the policy of my "Middle-Way Approach". I truly believe that a resolution of the Tibetan issue along the lines of my approach will bring satisfaction to the Tibetan people and greatly contribute to stability and unity in the People's Republic of China. Over the past more than 20 years

our contacts with the Chinese government have taken many twists and turns, sometimes they have been more encouraging and at other times more disappointing.

Last July, my elder brother, Gyalo Thondup, once more made a personal visit to Beijing and brought back a message from the United Front Department reiterating the well-known position of the leadership in Beijing on relations with me. In September of the same year we communicated through the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi our wish to send a delegation to Beijing to deliver a detailed memorandum outlining my thinking on the issue of Tibet and to explain and discuss the points raised in the memorandum. I sincerely hoped that this development would lead to an opening for a realistic approach to the Tibetan issue. I reasoned with the Chinese leadership that through face-to-face meetings we would succeed in clarifying misunderstandings and overcoming distrust. I expressed the strong belief that once this is achieved then a mutually acceptable solution of the problem can be found without much difficulty. So far the Chinese government is refusing to accept my delegation in spite of the fact that between 1979 and 1985 the Chinese government had accepted 6 Tibetan delegations from exile. Yet, now they are stalling the acceptance of a Tibetan delegation. This is a clear indication of a hardening attitude of Beijing and a lack of political will to resolve the Tibetan problem.

The current hard-line policy of the leadership in Beijing will not deter us in our quest for freedom and peace through non-violence. Patience, courage and determination are essential for us Tibetans in a situation of such challenge and of fundamental importance. I firmly believe that there will be an opportunity in the future to seriously discuss the Tibetan issue and face the reality because there is no other choice either for China or for us.

When one looks at the situation inside Tibet it seems almost hopeless in the face of increasing repression, environmental destruction, and alarming developments undermining the identity and culture of Tibet as a result of the massive transfer of Chinese into Tibetan areas. However, the Tibetan issue is closely related with what is happening inside China. And China, no matter how powerful she may be, is still a part of the world. The global trend today is towards more accessibility, openness, freedom, democracy and respect for human rights. China is in fact already in the process of changing. In the long run there is no way that China can escape from truth, justice and freedom. It is most encouraging that there are a growing number of informed Chinese, including intellectuals and farsighted thinkers, who are not only showing concern but also expressing their solidarity to the Tibetan cause.

Because the situation inside Tibet still remains serious, as I stated before, and also because the Chinese authorities are refusing to discuss the Tibetan issue, there is growing criticism of my policy of "Middle-Way Approach". I have always welcomed the right to have different political views. There are those who hold firmly to the goal of independence of Tibet. There is also criticism that my position is causing division and confusion among our people. I can understand the increasing criticism because China refuses to constructively respond to my "Middle-Way Approach". Moreover, the overwhelming majority of the Tibetan people have no doubts in their hearts and minds

that independence is their historical and legitimate right. While I firmly reject the use of violence as a means in our freedom struggle, I respect the right of every Tibetan to discuss and explore all political options.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the numerous individuals, governments, members of parliament, non-governmental organisations and various religious orders for their support. I would also like to express my gratitude to the many unbiased Chinese who are supporting our just cause. Above all I would like to express on behalf of the Tibetans our gratitude to the people and the Government of India for their unsurpassed generosity and support during these past 4 decades. In conclusion I pay homage to the brave men and women of Tibet who have and who continue to sacrifice their lives for the cause of our freedom and pray for an early end to the sufferings of our people. I also take this opportunity to pay tribute to our brave Chinese brothers and sisters who have also made tremendous sacrifices for freedom and democracy in China.

THE DALAI LAMA  
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