

Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the Forty-Third Anniversary of Tibetan National Uprising Day 10 March 2002

10 March, 2002

Today, we commemorate the forty-third anniversary of the Tibetan people's Uprising. However, I have always considered the present and future more important than the past.

The world is greatly concerned with the problem of terrorism as a consequence of September 11. Internationally, the majority of the governments are in agreement that there is an urgent need for joint efforts to combat terrorism, and a series of measures have been adopted. Unfortunately, the present measures lack a long-term and comprehensive approach to deal with the root causes of terrorism. What is required is a well-thought-out, long-term strategy to promote globally a political culture of non-violence and dialogue. The international community must assume a responsibility to give strong and effective support to non-violent movements committed to peaceful changes. Otherwise, it will be seen as hypocrisy to condemn and combat those who have risen in anger and despair but to continue to ignore those who have consistently espoused restraint and dialogue as a constructive alternative to violence.

We must draw lessons from the experiences we gained. If we look back at the last century, the most devastating cause of human suffering has been the culture of violence in resolving differences and conflicts. The challenge before us, therefore, is to make this new 21st century a century of dialogue when conflicts are resolved non-violently.

In human societies there will always be differences of opinions and interests. However, the reality today is that we are all inter-dependent and have to co-exist with one another on this small planet. As a result, the only sensible and intelligent way to resolving differences and clash of interests today, whether between individuals, communities or nations, is through dialogue in the spirit of compromise and reconciliation. We need to research, develop and teach this spirit of non-violence and invest in these efforts as much resources as we do for military defence.

Within the context of the present tense political atmosphere the Chinese authorities in Tibet have continued in the past year to subject Tibetans inside Tibet to gross violations of human rights, including religious persecution. This has led to an increasing number of Tibetans risking their lives to flee Tibet and to find refuge elsewhere. Last summer the expulsion of thousands of Tibetan and Chinese monks and nuns from a Tibetan Buddhist learning institute at Serthar in Eastern Tibet highlighted the intensity and scale of the repression in Tibet. These abuses of rights are a clear example of how Tibetans are deprived of their right to assert and preserve their own identity and culture.

I believe that many of the violations of human rights in Tibet are the result of suspicion, lack of trust and true understanding of Tibetan culture and religion. As I have said many times in the past, it is extremely important for the Chinese leadership to come to a better and deeper understanding and appreciation of the Tibetan Buddhist culture and

civilisation. I absolutely support Deng Xiaoping's wise statement that we must "seek truth from facts". Therefore, we Tibetans must accept the progress and improvements that China's rule of Tibet has brought to the Tibetan people and give recognition to it. At the same time the Chinese authorities must understand that the Tibetans have had to undergo tremendous suffering and destruction during the past five decades. The late Panchen Lama in his last public address in Shigatse on January 24, 1989 stated that Chinese rule in Tibet had brought more destruction than benefit to the Tibetan people.

The Buddhist culture of Tibet inspires the Tibetans with values and concepts of compassion, forgiveness, patience and a reverence for all forms of life that are of practical benefit and relevance in daily life and hence the wish to preserve it. Sadly, our Buddhist culture and way of life are under threat of total extinction. The majority of Chinese "development" plans in Tibet are designed to assimilate Tibet completely into the Chinese society and culture and to overwhelm Tibetans demographically by transferring large numbers of Chinese into Tibet. This unfortunately reveals that Chinese policies in Tibet continue to be dominated by "ultra-leftists" in the Chinese government, despite the profound changes carried out by the Chinese government and the Party elsewhere in the People's Republic of China. This policy is unbecoming of a proud nation and culture such as China and against the spirit of the 21st century.

The global trend today is towards more openness, freedom, democracy and respect for human rights. No matter how big and powerful China may be, she is still a part of the world. Sooner or later China will have to follow the world trend. In the coming months and years the process of change that has already taken place in China will accelerate. As a Buddhist monk, I would like China, which is home to almost a quarter of the world's entire population, to undergo this change peacefully. Chaos and instability will only lead to large-scale bloodshed and tremendous suffering to millions of people. Such a situation would also have serious ramifications for peace and stability throughout the world. And as a human being, it is my sincere desire that our Chinese brothers and sisters enjoy freedom, democracy, prosperity and peace.

Whether the coming changes in China will bring new life and new hope for Tibet and whether China establishes herself as a reliable, constructive, peaceful and leading member of the international community depends largely on whether China continues to define herself mainly through her size, number, military and economic powers or whether she decides to commit herself to universal human values and principles and define her strength and greatness through them. This decision by China, in turn, will be influenced to a large degree by the attitude and policies of the international community towards China. I have always drawn attention to the need to bring Beijing into the mainstream of world democracy and have spoken against any idea 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 government.

It is my sincere hope that the Chinese leadership will find the courage, wisdom and vision to solve the Tibetan issue through negotiations. 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. It would have a strong, positive impact on the people in Taiwan and will also do much to improve Sino-Indian relations by inspiring genuine trust and confidence. Times of change are also times of opportunities. I truly believe that one day, there will be the chance at dialogue and peace because there is no other choice for China or for us. The present state of affairs in Tibet does nothing to alleviate the grievances of the Tibetan people or to bring stability and unity to the People's Republic of China. Sooner or later, the leadership in Beijing will have to face this fact. On my part, I remain committed to the process of dialogue. As soon as there is a positive signal from Beijing, my designated representatives stand ready to meet with officials of the Chinese government anywhere, anytime.

My position on the issue of Tibet is straightforward. I am not seeking independence. As I have said many times before, what I am seeking is for the Tibetan people to be given the opportunity to have genuine self-rule in order to preserve their civilisation and for the unique Tibetan culture, religion, language and way of life to grow and thrive. For this, it is essential that the Tibetans be able to handle all their domestic affairs and to freely determine their social, economic and cultural development.

In exile we continue with the democratisation of the Tibetan polity. Last March, I informed the elected representatives of the Assembly of Tibetan People's Deputies that the Tibetan exiles must directly elect the next Kalon Tripa (Chairman of the Tibetan Cabinet). Consequently, last August for the first time in Tibet's history, the Tibetan exiles directly elected Samdhong Rinpoche as the new Kalon Tripa by a margin of over 84% of the total votes cast. This is a big step forward in the continuing growth and maturity of democracy in our exile Tibetan community. It is my hope that in the future Tibet can also enjoy an elected democratic government.

I take this opportunity to thank the numerous individuals, including members of governments, of parliaments and of non-governmental organisations who have been continuing to support our non-violent freedom struggle. It is most encouraging to note that 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. 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 sympathy and support shown to our cause by a growing number of well-informed Chinese brothers and sisters is of special significance and a great encouragement to us Tibetans. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to and pray for the many Chinese brothers and sisters who have made tremendous sacrifices for freedom and democracy in China. 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. The growing international support for Tibet reflects the inherent human empathy for and solidarity with human suffering and a universal appreciation for truth and justice. I appeal to governments, parliaments and to our friends to continue their support and efforts with a renewed sense of dedication and vigour.

Finally, 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 suffering of our people.

The Dalai Lama
March 10, 2002