

**Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the Forty-Fourth  
Anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising Day  
10th March 2003**

Our sincere greetings to fellow Tibetans in Tibet and in exile and to our friends and supporters all over the world on the occasion of the 44th anniversary of the Tibetan People's Uprising of 1959. While there were positive developments on the overall issue of Tibet, we remain concerned about the continuing marginalization of Tibetans in their own country and Chinese actions on the human rights and religious freedom of the Tibetan people in the past year.

The 16th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party ushered a new era in China by smoothly transferring the leadership from the third to the fourth generation. This is a sign of political maturity and adaptability. The reforms, initiated by Deng Xiaoping and continued under President Jiang Zemin, have brought about great changes in China, especially in the fields of economy, trade and in the conduct of international relations. I welcome this development since I have always drawn attention to the need to bring China into the mainstream of the world community and have spoken against any idea of isolating and containing China. Unfortunately, in sharp contrast to these positive aspects, such a pragmatic and flexible approach has been lacking when it comes to upholding the basic civil and political rights and freedoms of its citizens, especially with regard to those of the so-called minorities within the People's Republic of China.

We were encouraged by the release of several Tibetan and Chinese political prisoners of conscience during the past year. Among them Tibetan prisoners such as Takna Jigme Sangpo and Ani Ngawang Sangdrol who spent years in prison solely for daring to express their views on Chinese policies in Tibet and in particular on Tibetan history represent the courage and determination of the Tibetan people inside Tibet.

I was pleased that the Chinese government made it possible for my envoys to visit Beijing to re-establish direct contact with the Chinese leadership and to also visit Tibet to interact with the leading local Tibetan officials. The visit of my envoys last September to Beijing provided the opportunities to explain to the Chinese leadership our views on the issue of Tibet. I was encouraged that the exchanges of views were friendly and meaningful.

I had instructed my envoys to make every effort to pursue a course of dialogue with the leadership in Beijing and to seize every opportunity to dispel existing misunderstandings and misconceptions in Beijing about our views and positions. This is the only sensible, intelligent and human way to resolve differences and establish understanding. It will not be an easy task nor can it be accomplished within a short period of time. However, it provides the Tibetan and Chinese peoples a unique and crucial opportunity to put behind them decades of bitterness, distrust and resentment and to form a new relationship based on equality, friendship and mutual benefit.

Successive Chinese leaders have acknowledged and promised to respect with understanding and tolerance Tibet's distinct culture, history and identity. In reality, whenever Tibetans demonstrate allegiance and concern for their own people the Chinese authorities resort to their usual "policy of merciless repression", whereby they are labelled as "splittists" and as a result arrested and imprisoned. They have no opportunity to speak out the truth. The recent execution of Lobsang Dhondup and the death sentence given to Tulku Tenzin Delek without due process of law are clear examples of this policy, which cannot resolve the problem and therefore must be changed.

It is my sincere hope that the Chinese leadership will find the courage, vision and wisdom for new openings to solve the Tibetan issue through dialogue. Looking around the world we cannot fail to notice how unattended conflicts with ethnic roots can erupt in ways that make them extremely difficult to solve. It is, therefore, in the interest of the People's Republic of China to address such issues. A new creative initiative to resolve the issue of Tibet would serve as a very convincing sign that China is changing, maturing and becoming more receptive to assuming a greater role on the global stage as a reliable and forward-looking power. A constructive approach to the issue of Tibet provides important opportunities to create a political climate of trust, confidence and openness, both domestically and internationally. Such an expression of Chinese leadership during this time of deep anxiety over international conflicts, terrorism and ethnic strife in the world will go a long way to impressing and reassuring the world.

It is necessary to recognize that the Tibetan freedom struggle is not about my personal position or well-being. As early as in 1969 I made it clear that it is up to the Tibetan people to decide whether the centuries-old institution of the Dalai Lama should continue or not. In 1992 in a formal announcement I stated clearly that when we return to Tibet with a certain degree of freedom I would not hold any office in the Tibetan government nor any other political position. However, as I often state, till my last day I will remain committed to the promotion of human values and religious harmony. I also announced then that the Tibetan Administration-in-Exile should be dissolved and that the Tibetans in Tibet must shoulder the main responsibility of running the Tibetan government. I have always believed that in the future Tibet should follow a secular and democratic system of governance. It is, therefore, baseless to allege that our efforts are aimed at the restoration of Tibet's old social system. No Tibetan, whether in exile or in Tibet, has any desire to restore old Tibet's outdated social order. On the contrary, the democratisation of the Tibetan community started soon upon our arrival in exile. This culminated in the direct election of our political leadership in 2001. We are committed to continue to take vigorous actions to further promote democratic values among the ordinary Tibetans.

As far back as the early seventies in consultation with senior Tibetan officials I made a decision to seek a solution to the Tibetan problem through a "Middle Way Approach". This framework does not call for independence and separation of Tibet. At the same time it provides genuine autonomy for the six million men and women who consider themselves Tibetans to preserve their distinctive identity, to promote their religious and cultural heritage that is based on a centuries-old philosophy which is of benefit even in the 21st century, and to protect the delicate environment of the Tibetan plateau. This

approach will contribute to the overall stability and unity of the People's Republic of China. I remain committed to this realistic and pragmatic approach and will continue to make every effort to reach a mutually acceptable solution.

The reality today is that we are all interdependent and we have to co-exist on this small planet. Therefore, the only sensible and intelligent way of resolving differences, whether between individuals, peoples or nations, is through a political culture of non-violence and dialogue. Since our struggle is based on truth, justice and non-violence and is not directed against China, we have been fortunate to receive increasing worldwide sympathy and support, including from amongst the Chinese. I express my appreciation and gratitude for this consistent solidarity. I would also like to express once again on behalf of the Tibetans our appreciation and immense gratitude to the people and the Government of India for their unwavering and unmatched generosity and support.

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, 2003