

ADDRESS TO THE PLENARY SESSION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

By His Holiness The Dalai Lama XIV

Your Excellency, Mr. President, Honorable Members of the Parliament, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour to speak before you today and I thank you for your invitation. Wherever I go, my main interest or commitment is in the promotion of human values such as warm heartedness – this is what I consider the key factor for a happy life at the individual level, family level and community level. In our modern times, it seems that insufficient attention is paid to these inner values. Promoting them is therefore my number one commitment.

My second interest or commitment is the promotion of inter-religious harmony. We accept the need for pluralism in politics and democracy, yet we often seem more hesitant about the plurality of faiths and religions. Despite their different concepts and philosophies, all major religious traditions bear the same messages of love, compassion, tolerance, contentment and self-discipline. They are also similar in having the potential to help human beings lead happier lives. So these two are my main interests and commitments.

Of course the issue of Tibet is also of particular concern to me and I have a special responsibility to the people of Tibet, who continue to place their hope and trust in me during this most difficult period in the history of Tibet. The welfare of the Tibetan people is my constant motivation and I consider myself to be their free spokesperson in exile.

The last time I had the privilege to address the European Parliament (EP), on October 24, 2001, I stated, “despite some development and economic progress, Tibet continues to face fundamental problems of survival. Serious violations of human rights are widespread throughout Tibet and are often the result of policies of racial and cultural discrimination. Yet, they are only the symptoms and consequences of a deeper problem. The Chinese authorities view Tibet’s distinct culture and religion as the source of threat of separation. Hence as a result of deliberate policies an entire people with its unique culture and identity are facing the threat of extinction”.

Since March this year, Tibetans from all walks of life and across the entire Tibetan plateau demonstrated against the oppressive and discriminatory policies of the Chinese authorities in Tibet. With full awareness of the imminent danger to their lives, Tibetans from all across Tibet known as Cholka-Sum (U-Tsang, Kham and Amdo), young and old, men and women, monastic and lay people, believer and non-believers, including students, came together to spontaneously and courageously express their anguish, dissatisfaction and genuine grievances at the policies of the Chinese government. I have been deeply saddened by the loss of life, both Tibetan and Chinese, and immediately

appealed to the Chinese authorities for restraint. Since the Chinese authorities have blamed me for orchestrating the recent events in Tibet, I have made repeated appeals for an independent and respected international body to conduct a thorough investigation into the matter, including inviting them to Dharamsala, India. If the Chinese government has any evidence to support such serious allegations, they must disclose it to the world.

Sadly, the Chinese authorities have resorted to brutal methods to deal with the situation in Tibet, despite appeals by many world leaders, NGOs and personalities of international standing to avoid violence and show restraint. In the process, a large number of Tibetans have been killed, thousands injured and detained. There are many whose fate remains completely unknown. Even as I stand here before you, in many parts of Tibet there is a huge presence of armed police and military. In many areas Tibetans continue to suffer under a state of de-facto martial law. There is an atmosphere of angst and intimidation. Tibetans in Tibet live in a constant state of fear of being the next to be arrested. With no international observers, journalists or even tourists allowed into many parts of Tibet, I am deeply worried about the fate of the Tibetans. Presently, the Chinese authorities have a completely free hand in Tibet. It is as though Tibetans face a death sentence, a sentence aimed at wiping out the spirit of the Tibetan people.

Many honorable members of the EP are well aware of my consistent efforts to find a mutually acceptable solution to the Tibet problem through dialogue and negotiations. In this spirit, in 1988 at the European Parliament in Strasbourg I presented a formal proposal for negotiations that does not call for separation and independence of Tibet. Since then, our relations with the Chinese government have taken many twists and turns. After an interruption of nearly 10 years, in 2002 we re-established direct contact with the Chinese leadership. Extensive discussions have been held between my envoys and representatives of the Chinese leadership. In these discussions we have put forth clearly the aspirations of the Tibetan people. The essence of my Middle Way Approach is to secure genuine autonomy for the Tibetan people within the scope of the Constitution of the PRC.

During the seventh round of talks in Beijing on 1st and 2nd July this year, the Chinese side invited us to present our views on the form of genuine autonomy. Accordingly, on 31st October 2008 we presented to the Chinese leadership the Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan People. Our memorandum puts forth our position on genuine autonomy and how the basic needs of the Tibetan nationality for autonomy and self-government can be met. We have presented these suggestions with the sole purpose of making a sincere effort to address the real problems in Tibet. We were confident that given goodwill, the issues raised in our memorandum could be implemented.

Unfortunately, the Chinese side has rejected our memorandum in its totality, branding our suggestions as an attempt at “semi-independence” and “independence in disguise” and, for that reason, unacceptable. Moreover, the Chinese side is accusing us of “ethnic cleansing” because our memorandum calls for the recognition of the right of

autonomous areas "to regulate the residence, settlement and employment or economic activities of persons who wish to move to Tibetan areas from other parts of the PRC."

We have made it clear in our memorandum that our intention is not to expel non-Tibetans. Our concern is the induced mass movement of primarily Han, but also some other nationalities, into many Tibetan areas, which in turn marginalizes the native Tibetan population and threatens Tibet's fragile natural environment. Major demographic changes that result from massive migration will lead to the assimilation rather than integration of the Tibetan nationality into the PRC and gradually lead to the extinction of the distinct culture and identity of the Tibetan people.

The cases of the peoples of Manchuria, Inner Mongolia and East Turkestan in the PRC are clear examples of the devastating consequences of a massive population transfer of the dominant Han nationality upon the minority nationalities. Today, the language, script and culture of the Manchu people have become extinct. In Inner Mongolia today, only 20% are native Mongolians out of a total population of 24 millions.

Despite the assertions by some hard-line Chinese officials to the contrary, from the copies of our memorandum made available to you it is clear that we have sincerely addressed the concerns of the Chinese government about the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the PRC. The memorandum is self-explanatory. I would welcome your comments and suggestions.

I take this opportunity to appeal to the European Union and the Parliament to use your good offices, sparing no efforts, to persuade the Chinese leadership to resolve the issue of Tibet through earnest negotiations for the common good of the Tibetan and Chinese peoples.

While I firmly reject the use of violence as a means in our struggle, we certainly have the right to explore all other political options available to us. In the spirit of democracy, I called for a Special Meeting of Tibetans in exile to discuss the state of Tibetan people and the state of the issue of Tibet and the future course of our movement. The meeting took place from November 17-22, 2008 in Dharamsala, India. The failure of the Chinese leadership to respond positively to our initiatives has reaffirmed the suspicion held by many Tibetans that the Chinese government has no interest whatsoever in any kind of mutually acceptable solution. Many Tibetans continue to believe that the Chinese leadership is bent on the forceful and complete assimilation and absorption of Tibet into China. They therefore call for the complete independence of Tibet. Others advocate the right to self-determination and a referendum in Tibet. Despite these different views, the delegates to the Special Meeting unanimously resolved to empower me to decide the best approach, in accordance with the prevailing situation and the changes taking place in Tibet, China and the wider world. I will study the suggestions made by about 600 leaders and delegates from Tibetan communities around the world, including views we are able to gather from a cross section of Tibetans in Tibet.

I am a staunch believer in democracy. Consequently, I have consistently encouraged Tibetans in exile to follow the democratic process. Today, the Tibetan refugee community may be among the few refugee communities that have established all three

pillars of democracy: legislature, judiciary and executive. In 2001, we took another great stride in the process of democratization by having the chairman of the Kashag (cabinet) of the Tibetan Administration in exile elected by popular vote.

I have always maintained that ultimately the Tibetan people must be able to decide the future of Tibet. As Pundit Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, stated in the Indian Parliament on December 7, 1950: “The last voice in regard to Tibet should be the voice of the people of Tibet and nobody else.”

The issue of Tibet has dimensions and implications that go well beyond the fate of six million Tibetans. Tibet is situated between India and China. For centuries Tibet acted as a peaceful buffer zone separating the two most populated countries on earth. However, in 1962, only a few years after the so-called “peaceful liberation of Tibet” the world witnessed the first ever war between the two Asian giants. This clearly shows the importance of a just and peaceful resolution of the Tibet question in ensuring lasting and genuine trust and friendship between the two most powerful nations of Asia. The Tibetan issue is also related to Tibet’s fragile environment, which scientists have concluded, has an impact on much of Asia involving billions of people. The Tibetan plateau is the source of many of Asia’s greatest rivers. Tibet’s glaciers are the earth’s largest ice mass outside the Poles. Some environmentalists today refer to Tibet as the Third Pole. And, if the present warming trend continues the Indus River might dry up within the next 15-20 years. Furthermore, Tibet’s cultural heritage is based on Buddhism’s principle of compassion and non-violence. Thus, it concerns not just the six million Tibetans, but also the over 13 million people across the Himalayas, Mongolia and in the Republics of Kalmykia and Buryat in Russia who share this culture, which has the potential to contribute to a *peaceful* and harmonious world.

My maxim has always been to hope for the best and to prepare for the worst. With this in mind, I have counseled the Tibetans in exile to make more rigorous efforts in educating the younger generation of Tibetans, in strengthening our cultural and religious institutions in exile with the aim of preserving our rich cultural heritage, and in expanding and strengthening the democratic institutions and civil society among the Tibetan refugee community. One of the main objectives of our exile community is to preserve our cultural heritage where there is the freedom to do so and to be the free voice of our captive people inside Tibet. The tasks and challenges we face are daunting. As a refugee community, our resources are naturally limited. We Tibetans also need to face the reality that our exile may last for a longer time. I would therefore be grateful to the European Union for assistance in our educational and cultural endeavors.

I have no doubt that the principled and consistent engagement of the EP with China will impact the process of change that is already taking place in China. The global trend is towards more openness, freedom, democracy and respect for human rights. Sooner or later, China will have to follow the world trend. In this context, I wish to commend the EP for awarding the prestigious Sakharov Prize to the Chinese human rights defender Hu Jia. It is an important signal as we watch China rapidly moving forward. With its newfound status, China is poised to play an important leading role on the world stage. In order to fulfill this role, I believe it is vital for China to have openness, transparency, rule of law and freedom of information and thought. There is no doubt that the attitudes

and policies of members of the international community towards China will impact the course of the change taking place in China as much as domestic events and developments.

In contrast to the continued extremely rigid attitude of the Chinese government towards Tibet, fortunately among the Chinese people – especially among the informed and educated Chinese circles – there is a growing understanding and sympathy for the plight of the Tibetan people. Although my faith in the Chinese leadership with regard to Tibet is becoming thinner and thinner, my faith in the Chinese people remains unshaken. I have therefore been advising the Tibetan people to make concerted efforts to reach out to the Chinese people. Chinese intellectuals openly criticized the harsh crackdown of Tibetan demonstrations by the Chinese government in March this year and called for restraint and dialogue in addressing the problems in Tibet. Chinese lawyers offered publicly to represent arrested Tibetan demonstrators at trials. Today, there is growing understanding, sympathy, support and solidarity among our Chinese brothers and sisters for the difficult situation of the Tibetans and their legitimate aspirations. This is most encouraging. I take this opportunity to thank the brave Chinese brothers and sisters for their solidarity.

I also thank the European Parliament for the consistent display of concern and support for the just and non-violent Tibetan struggle. Your sympathy, support and solidarity have always been a great source of inspiration and encouragement to the Tibetan people, both in and outside of Tibet. I would like to express special thanks to the members of the Tibet Inter-Group of the EP, who have made the tragedy of the Tibetan people not only a focus of their political work but also a cause of their hearts. The many resolutions of the EP on the issue of Tibet have helped greatly to highlight the plight of the Tibetan people and to raise the awareness of the issue of Tibet amongst the public and in governments here in Europe, and all around the world

The consistency of the European Parliament's support for Tibet has not gone unnoticed in China. I regret where this has caused some tensions in EU-China relations. However, I wish to share with you my sincere hope and belief that the future of Tibet and China will move beyond mistrust to a relationship based on mutual respect, trust and recognition of common interest – irrespective of the current very grim situation inside Tibet and the deadlock in the dialogue process between my envoys and the Chinese leadership. I have no doubt that your continued expressions of concern and support for Tibet will, in the long run, have a positive impact and help create the necessary political environment for a peaceful resolution of the issue of Tibet. Your continued support is, therefore, critical.

I thank you for the honor to share my thoughts with you.

Brussels, 4 December 2008