

Opening Statement of
Ranking Member Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
Before the Full Committee Hearing on Tibet
Tuesday, March 13, 2007

I would like to welcome the distinguished group of Tibetan experts, who are here to address the Committee today.

Tibet is a subject very dear to the hearts of many of us here, including both Chairman Lantos and myself.

In recognition of the many enduring and outstanding contributions to peace, nonviolence, human rights and religious understanding by his Holiness, I authored H.R. 4562, co-sponsored by Mr. Lantos, which honors the Dalai Lama with the congressional gold medal.

We all look forward to the day later this year when His Holiness receives that well-deserved medal.

Why is there a mystical attraction for many Americans to Tibet, a mountainous land almost half the world away, variously known as “the roof of the world” and the “land of snows?”

I believe that the reason lies with the patience, perseverance, benevolence and integrity that the people of Tibet have constantly portrayed, especially in the face of extremely dire circumstances.

These characteristics are personified best by Tibet’s great religious leader, the Dalai Lama, who has won the world’s respect and admiration.

With such international acclaim, one must ask the question: why does Beijing obstinately continue to refuse to sit down and talk to this distinguished Nobel Peace Prize laureate about his “middle way approach”?

The reason is clear: cultural domination by China requires religious suppression in Tibet.

The recently released State Department report on human rights practices in Tibet for 2006 leaves little cause for optimism.

For instance, last September, Chinese People’s Armed Police fired on approximately seventy Tibetan refugees seeking to cross into Nepal, killing a seventeen year-old nun and wounding several others.

Thirty of the surviving refugees were rounded up and sent to a labor camp, where they were reportedly tortured with cattle prods.

Moreover, the State Department reports that arbitrary arrests in Tibetan areas continue unabated and respect for religious freedom remains “poor.”

The report also notes that Beijing “exercised strict control over most monasteries” through the so-called “democratic management committees” and “imposed strict limits on the number of monks in major monasteries.”

Many fear that Tibetans will some day become a minority in their own land, like the Mongols in China’s Inner Mongolia or, worse, will suffer the fate of near extinction, as with the Manchus in Manchuria.

The inauguration of the railroad line from Qinghai (Ching-High) to Lhasa (LA-SAH) last July, attended by the Chinese President, has reportedly brought a further deluge of Chinese transient workers, business persons and tourists into Tibet.

Can Tibet remain truly Tibetan, given these expanding demographic pressures?

Congress, through such activities as funding for Radio Free Asia (RFA) and legislative requirements raised in the Tibetan Policy Act of 2001, which I co-sponsored, has sought to move our nation’s Tibetan policy forward in constructive directions.

However, it has been recently called to my attention that RFA’s Broadcasting Board of Governors is reportedly considering to cut back Tibetan broadcasting by one third and completely eliminate Cantonese language service in its FY2008 budget recommendation.

The priority which the Congress places on Tibetan broadcasting should be clearly evident to those attending this hearing.

With regard to Cantonese language broadcasting, it should also be evident that Congress has a clear interest in having uncensored news available to 150 million Chinese people living in China’s most vibrant economic region, the Pearl River Delta.

With regard to the Tibetan Policy Act, it is my understanding that our Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues has consistently been denied access by the Chinese regime to Tibetan areas.

This is a direct affront to Congressional intent articulated in law, calling for the Coordinator to conduct “regular travel to Tibetan areas.”

I would urge the State Department to immediately seek to remedy this situation.

The same would be true of the Congressional intent for an establishment of a United

States branch office in Lhasa.

We should insist on reciprocity before allowing Beijing to open any additional consulates, and Lhasa should be at the top of our list.

Further, the Tibetan Policy Act states that: “The Secretary shall ensure that Tibetan language training is available to Foreign Service Officers and that every effort is made to ensure that a Tibetan-speaking Foreign Service Officer is assigned to a United States post in the People’s Republic of China responsible for monitoring developments in Tibet.”

What is the status of implementation of this provision?

In closing, I would simply reiterate the deep and abiding interest of the American people in Tibet and welcome our witnesses today.

I look forward to hearing their insight on these critical issues.