

Comments by Lodi Gyari Gyaltzen at a Reception Hosted by ICT for Tibetan Americans and Tibet Supporters Participating in Tibet Lobby Day 2010



On Monday, March 1 as part of the International Campaign for Tibet's Lobby Day program ICT hosted a reception for the Lobby Day participants and friends of ICT. Lodi Gyari, Special Envoy of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Executive Chairman of ICT's Board of Directors made remarks to the gathering the highlights of which are below.

Tashi Delek.

Let me wish you all a Happy New Year. I want to talk a little bit about Losar, because I think there has been quite a bit of discussion this year on whether or not we should celebrate Losar.

I think it's very important that we celebrate Losar. When the Kashag sent a circular out to Tibetans I do not think the Kashag was asking that we do not celebrate Losar. The Kashag was simply saying, in order to reflect the situation inside Tibet we should not celebrate in an extravagant way.

But otherwise, I do think it is very important for us to celebrate Losar, an important part of our heritage. After all, what are we struggling for? Preservation of the unique and distinctive character of our people, and Losar reflects that. Losar gives us the opportunity to tell ourselves who we are, as well as tell the rest of the world who we are.

I was really quite disappointed: there were less people calling with greetings on New Year's Day, and some people even called and said, "I know we are not celebrating Losar" – I was disappointed because of course there's Losar! Losar is the heralding of the New Year, and we Tibetans are always thinking about auspiciousness – *themde*. Just from that perspective alone it's very important for us to celebrate.

We should take our cue from Tibetans inside, where they celebrated more than ever before. They knew that His Holiness was here in the United States on the third day of Losar which is very, very auspicious. In Lhasa, I was told there were unprecedented numbers of Tibetans at the Jokhang and Potala celebrating Losar, but also showing their determination to the Chinese authorities.

They did not put their finest clothes on; but simply because Tibetans inside do not dress up doesn't mean that we too should not dress up. The Tibetans inside did not dress up because the Chinese authorities frequently make propaganda out of them: when they see Tibetans wearing colorful costumes they take photographs of them and tell the world, "Look at how happy the Tibetans are!" But the Tibetans inside Tibet are very smart. They'll celebrate – they'll go to the Jokhang, to the Potala, to the monasteries – but they'll refuse to wear new clothes, because they won't let the Chinese authorities gain advantages from their celebrations.

Here in exile where we are free, we need to celebrate and really showcase our rich culture and celebrate all of our national festivals and holidays.

And so, I wanted to greet you, Tibetans and Tibet supporters, on this New Year. It has been an unusually auspicious New Year for us. The very first activity of His Holiness was to come here and meet with President Barack Obama. I thought that really was a wonderful beginning to the New Year for us – the year of the Iron Tiger.

We Tibetans are always talking about auspiciousness, and of course, auspiciousness is also created by ourselves; so therefore we must always make sure we create the right auspiciousness. Your brothers and sisters in Tibet knew that too, and that's why under tremendous threats to their lives, not hundreds but thousands of them – many of them we heard lined up for four hours to get into the Jokhang. I'm sure you must have all heard about people in Amdo setting off fireworks to celebrate the meeting. They knew that this is an auspicious year for us.

And then very much related to this, I wanted to talk a little bit about His Holiness' historic visit to Washington, DC to meet with President Barack Obama.

I have to say, I was a little surprised and slightly disappointed by how a section of our people responded to this, one of the most important meetings that His Holiness has ever had with a President of the United States.

First of all, the decision not to have a meeting with President Obama in October was a decision that we took together with the Obama administration. This is something that I want to make very clear. His Holiness himself, during his recent visit I know made it very clear in his remarks through the media – and particularly when he spoke through the Tibetan media because he especially wanted Tibetans inside Tibet to get the right message – *we* took that decision. There must be no misunderstanding about that.

And looking back now this was once again a good example of how wise and far-sighted His Holiness is. This meeting that His Holiness just had with the President has since become such an important meeting: had he met with President Obama in October 2009, then it would have been just another meeting, just as he's had with all Presidents over the last sixteen or seventeen years.

It also brought an opportunity for people to express how strongly they care about Tibet. President Barack Obama, who has always cared about Tibet, who has always had the highest regard for His Holiness, was contacted about meeting His Holiness by thousands and thousands of Americans – from ordinary Americans to politicians – and he therefore has an even deeper appreciation now of how important this issue is for the American people.

With regard to creating our own auspiciousness, let me make a crucial point: every activity you do, every statement that you make, you should always bear in mind, how is it going to be registered in Beijing.

And in that context, I was somewhat disappointed with the reactions of some people to His Holiness' exit from the White House and the unfortunate image of His Holiness walking past piles of garbage bags. And I know some of you didn't like that photo, but I wanted to clearly state that the photo was not released by the White House. Similarly, His Holiness was not exiting from a "back door," as some people have suggested; but rather he was proceeding towards the White House grounds where an opportunity was provided for His Holiness to speak to the media.

Therefore, the White House was neither responsible for releasing this image, nor for him leaving by the "back door". We should not try to create the impression that it was deliberate by the White House, because it was not! This kind of thing only pleases people in Beijing.

And especially, please, always think about our brothers and sisters inside Tibet. Everything we do, we must be sure that it gives them further encouragement. It would be immoral for us to send a message that would demoralize them! Haven't they suffered enough? Don't they need some good news?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama is deeply respected and revered throughout the world, and the fact that we have such a leader in His Holiness should make us very proud.

And with Barack Obama, there is a special chemistry. On almost every global issue, these two Nobel Peace Laureates have almost identical approaches. For those of us who were able to participate, it was a wonderful meeting. It was as if they had known each other for their entire lives – maybe even for many lives!

Similarly, there was also some media reports that His Holiness was presented with cufflinks by President Obama as a gift. President Obama and his staff are intelligent enough to know that His Holiness doesn't need cufflinks! The President's gift to His Holiness in fact was very, very special, very unique, very historical, and also very meaningful. That gift was copies of correspondence that His Holiness has received from U.S. Presidents prior to 1949: first, the letter from Roosevelt to His Holiness, then the Kashag's letter to Roosevelt, His Holiness' letter to President Truman, and President Truman's letter to His Holiness.

Many of you may have heard that when His Holiness received the Congressional Gold Medal from the U.S. Congress, he mentioned a gold watch he received from Roosevelt, but he was too young at the time – only six or seven years old – to understand the importance of the letter from the President of the United States. And in fact, he had never really known exactly what that letter said. And so the gift from President Obama – with a handwritten note – was all the correspondence that His Holiness had with Roosevelt and with Truman. And that is a very powerfully symbolic gift – it demonstrates that the relationship between His Holiness and the United States is not something that happened in the last few years; it goes way back.

We should pay more attention to things that are important and “auspicious”. Why are we not talking more, and writing more about the statement issued by the White House after the meeting between President Obama and His Holiness – a statement that strongly endorsed His Holiness’ Middle Way Approach, and acknowledged our core issues on Tibet.

Finally, I wanted to say I’m very pleased that today there is such a large number of Tibetans, especially younger people who have come for this Lobby Day. This is a point I have made before on several occasions, but please allow me to make it again here: this is our struggle. We may make mistakes, but still, if you really care about Tibet, if you call yourselves supporters of Tibet, then get behind us and stand like a rock behind us so that we have something to lean against, and so we don’t fall back. But we will not allow anyone to lead us by the nose, not even friends. And so that’s why I’m very happy that this time there are more Tibetans, and especially young Tibetans. This is one indication I think that our struggle will continue.

Unlike other exile movements, ours is a movement that has a single leadership. I always say with pride when I go to Beijing that there may be some Tibetans who do not agree with His Holiness’ Middle Way Approach, but even those people respect His Holiness as much as I respect him. This must always be clearly communicated. Similarly, some of you may not agree with some of the policies of the Tibetan Government in Exile, but I don’t think there’s a single Tibetan who says it’s not my government.

And so these two messages must always be very clear. Unlike other movements where they have different factions and different leaders, ours is different because His Holiness is the undisputed leader. As I clearly tell Tibetans within the Chinese government in Beijing, there is only one person who truly represents the Tibetan people, and that is His Holiness, Tenzin Gyatso the Fourteenth Dalai Lama.

These things need to be constantly and clearly conveyed.

And so with that, my brief remarks became really rather long! Again, I’m especially happy to see so many young Tibetans here for Lobby Day. I’m not saying I don’t have any regard for people of our generation, because I think we have given enough service, and the future is being passed to the younger generation. Please let me wish you all happy Losar, and thank you.