

Tibet Brief

A monthly report of the International Campaign for Tibet



FEBRUARY 2010



Special Envoy Lodi Gyari (C) and Envoy Kelsang Gyaltsen (R), address the media in Dharamsala on the latest round

“This is an opportunity for world leaders to be constructive and help the parties identify a common goal.”

– Mary Beth Markey,
VP for International Advocacy, ICT

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9th round of Sino-Tibetan dialogue identifies elements to build upon

The Dalai Lama's envoys, led by Lodi Gyaltsen Gyari, visited China from January 26 to 31, 2010, for the ninth round of discussions with representatives of the Chinese leadership. This round was held after a gap of 15 months.

The International Campaign for Tibet welcomed the strong and detailed statement¹ issued on his return to Dharamsala by Lodi Gyaltsen Gyari, the chief interlocutor with Chinese officials during nine rounds of dialogue since 2002. Lodi Gyari and envoy Kelsang Gyaltsen briefed the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, India on 2 February before issuing the statement which concluded that “we do not see any reason why we cannot find common ground on these issues.” The statement included a proposal for “a common effort to study the actual reality on the ground, in the spirit of seeking truth from facts [to] help both the sides to move beyond each others' contentions” and an appeal to Beijing to stop mislabeling the Dalai Lama as a “separatist.”

“Those long troubled by the situation in Tibet,

both inside and outside of government, have been looking for ways to work constructively with the Chinese and Tibetans to secure an end to repression, genuine stability and a better way forward in Tibet. According to the Tibetan statement, this 9th round has produced some elements to build on,” said Mary Beth Markey, Vice President for International Advocacy at the International Campaign for Tibet. “The reference to common ground is an encouraging result from this round of dialogue, and both sides have identified stability as a goal, although they diverge on the means to achieve it. This is an opportunity for world leaders to be constructive and help the parties identify a common goal for the talks as a path to achieving the resolution of differences that the international community supports and seeks.”

In line with the Chinese government's strident approach, Zhu Weiqun, Executive Vice Chairman of the United Front Work Department of the Communist Party and one of the envoys' counterparts in the dialogue, told press in Beijing that there was no possibility of the “slightest

compromise” on the issue of sovereignty in Tibet and said that the two sides were still “sharply divided.” Zhu also warned that if US President Obama “chooses to meet with the Dalai Lama at this time, it will certainly threaten trust and co-operation between China and the United States.” (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/8492608.stm>) The White House has confirmed that President Obama will meet the Dalai Lama, although it has not yet announced a date.

The Chinese government has lately come to describe Tibet as a “core issue” of national sovereignty, and it has responded to the Dalai Lama's proposal for genuine autonomy for Tibetans within the People's Republic of China as “disguised independence.” But the Dalai Lama's proposition would not challenge Chinese sovereignty or claim as “Tibetan” or “autonomous” any territory beyond that which the government has already designated as “Tibetan autonomous” (the Tibet Autonomous Region and parts of Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu

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Top-level meeting in Beijing sets strategy on Tibet

The Dalai Lama's envoys traveled to China for talks at the end of January just days after the conclusion of a high-level meeting attended by President Hu Jintao, setting out China's Tibet policy for the coming years.

The Fifth Tibet Work Forum, held on January 18-20, is the most recent in a series of rare strategy meetings on Tibet that have now been held just five times since the Chinese took over Tibet in 1949-50. The meeting was attended by more than 300 of China's most senior Party, government and military leaders. Notably, the Fifth Tibet Work Forum concluded days before envoys of the Dalai Lama, led by Lodi Gyaltsen Gyari, arrived in China for the ninth round of Sino-Tibetan dialogue, some 15 months since the previous round.

The Fifth Tibet Work Forum was the first since the protests and crackdown beginning in March, 2008; the fourth was held in June, 2001. It was not announced in the official media until two days after the meeting was over, and the only prior indication that it was about to take place was a series of brief online articles in the state media in English referring to previous Tibet Work Forums. Since then, a carefully-chosen selection of statements from the meeting has been published in the official press, including speeches by Party Secretary and President Hu Jintao, and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao.

Summary points from official media reports

- Reports on the Fifth Tibet Work Forum in the official media do not indicate a policy shift on Tibet – the emphasis is still on consolidating central control by further assimilation of Tibet into a 'unified' Chinese state – but there is a difference in tone and approach, with a notable lack of virulent rhetoric against the Dalai Lama, which is usually such a prevalent feature of official comment and reporting on Tibet.
- Reports indicate that there is more of an emphasis on improving conditions in rural areas, although this emphasis still exists within a model of economic development based on infrastructure construction and resource extraction that has shown to deepen the marginalization and poverty of Tibetans. While this new focus on improving conditions in rural areas could be a positive step, the strategy for Tibet's development as a whole needs to be addressed. The reports suggest that there is less emphasis on the large amount of funds spent on major 'aid and development' projects compared to previous Party and government planning documents on Tibet, which may signal a recognition that flooding Tibet with money does not automatically secure loyalty to the state. Tibetans from some of the most 'developed' areas of Tibet including Lhasa and parts of eastern Tibet were at the forefront of protests from March 2008 onwards.
- Reports from the Fifth Tibet Work Forum demonstrate that Tibet is not of marginal concern but is a core issue to the Party, as evidenced by the strategic significance of Tibet laid out in the published statements. Compared to previous high-level meetings and in line with global concerns on climate change, the Fifth Tibet Work Forum emphasizes security issues linked to the environment of the Tibetan plateau, which is the source of Asia's major rivers. The Party's assertion of control over Tibet's natural resources and fragile eco-system is in the context of an increasing international awareness of the global significance of the impact of climate change in Tibet. Many scientists characterize the Tibetan plateau as the earth's 'third pole' because it has the biggest ice-fields outside the Arctic and Antarctic.
- While the Fourth Tibet Work Forum in 2001 focused on the Tibet Autonomous Region, the Fifth includes all Tibetan areas in Sichuan, Yunnan, Gansu and Qinghai provinces – encompassing the eastern Tibetan regions of Amdo and Kham – which may indicate a trend towards regional integration of policies across all Tibetan areas of the PRC. Government statements have typically represented only the Tibet Autonomous Region as 'Tibet.' The protests that began in March

9th round...

and Yunnan provinces, roughly equivalent to the geography of the Tibetan plateau).

In his statement,³ Lodi Gyari said that the talks included a briefing on the Fifth Tibet Work Forum, a top-level strategy meeting that concluded in Beijing in the week before the envoys arrived in China. The envoys in turn welcomed indications from the proceedings that the authorities were seeking to improve the lives of Tibetans, particularly those in rural areas, and that the meeting covered the issue of development in all Tibetan areas of the People's Republic of China, including those Tibetan areas outside the Tibet Autonomous Region. The envoys said: "If we take away the political slogans, many of the issues that have been prioritized by the Forum are similar to the basic needs of the Tibetan people outlined in our Memorandum [on Genuine Autonomy]."

"China continues to demonstrate by meeting with the Dalai Lama's envoys and their menacing remarks aimed at Washington that the Tibet issue ranks very high in Chinese diplomacy. A failed strategy in Tibet is a problem for China, and they know it. The bottom line is that the Tibetans are the key stakeholders and that means that the direct involvement of the Dalai Lama, whose legitimacy among the Tibetan people is indisputable, is essential for a peaceful and stable solution," Markey concluded.

Results from eight previous rounds of dialogue since 2002 have failed to meet the expectations of the international community. Since the Tibetans and Chinese last met in 2008 (October 31 - November 5), there have been serious developments in Tibet including the sentencing of Tibetans on political charges related to alleged contact with the so-called 'Dalai clique' in the context of a severe crackdown on expressions of Tibetan identity and an aggressive campaign to misrepresent the Dalai Lama's position internationally. ■

¹ <http://www.tibet.net/>

² <http://support.savetibet.org/site/R?i=xPATUQca5om-w6xUOoXcFw>

³ <http://savetibet.org/media-center/ict-news-reports/top-level-meeting-beijing-sets-strategy-tibet>

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Presidents Obama and Hu during the US-China Summit, Beijing, November 2009

President Obama to meet Dalai Lama

The White House confirmed on 2 February that U.S. President Barack Obama will meet with the Dalai Lama during his visit to Washington, DC on 17-18 February. The following day China responded with a warning to the US that the meeting would further damage ties between Beijing and Washington following the recent US decision on arms sales to Taiwan¹.

Ma Zhaoxu, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, said the Chinese government “resolutely opposes the leader of the United States having contact with the Dalai under any pretext or in any form”. Ma confirmed that President Hu himself had “explained China’s stern position” on the Dalai Lama during Obama’s China visit in November 2009.

“We urge the U.S. to fully grasp the high sensitivity of the Tibetan issues, to prudently and appropriately deal with related matters, and avoid bringing further damage to China-U.S. relations,” said Ma.

A Whitehouse spokesperson told reporters that “The president told China’s leaders during his trip last year that he would meet with the Dalai Lama and he intends to do so...We expect that our relationship with China is mature enough where we can work on areas of mutual concern such as climate, the global economy and non-proliferation and discuss frankly and candidly those areas where we disagree.” ■

¹ In late January 2010, the US Pentagon notified Congress of a proposed arms sale to Taiwan, worth \$6bn. The notification to Congress is required by law and does not mean the sale has been concluded. Congress has 30 days to comment on the proposed sale.

Top-level meeting...

2008 spread to all Tibetan areas in the PRC, indicating a shared Tibetan identity, a commonality of grievances, concerns and a determination to express a shared loyalty to the Dalai Lama.

- The Chinese authorities announced this week that they would hold the First Work Forum on the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (East Turkestan) after the regional capital Urumchi erupted in protests and rioting in July 2009. The strategy for Xinjiang is framed with a stronger emphasis on the “fight against splittism” and independence activism than in the Fifth Tibet Work Forum statements seen to date. This could indicate a distinction in the way the Party is now handling policy on Xinjiang and Tibet.

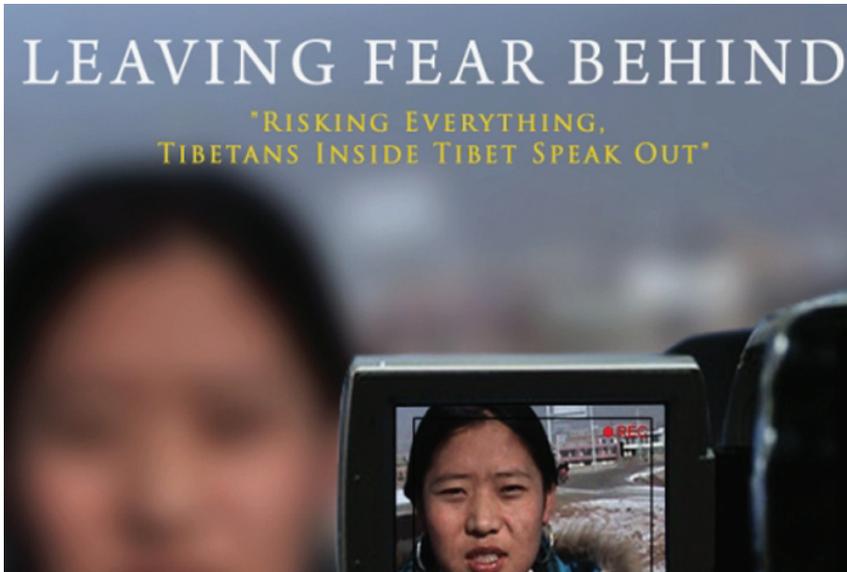
ICT has produced a thorough analysis of the details and significance of this crucial Work Forum, which can be downloaded at: <http://www.tibetpolicy.eu/news/update-on-tibet-situation/313-top-level-meeting-in-beijing-sets-strategy-on-tibet> ■

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China Jails Tibetan Filmmaker Dhondup Wangchen for 6 Years

Dhondup Wangchen, the Tibetan filmmaker who was arrested by the Chinese government for documenting the current situation in Tibet and Tibetan people's aspiration for return of the Dalai Lama to Tibet, has been sentenced to six years in prison, according to information received by the Central Tibetan Administration. The sentence was pronounced on 28 December 2009 but the location of the trial is not known.

A British Foreign Office statement referred to Dhondup Wangchen and leading Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo, who was sentenced to 11 years on the same charge.

"The verdict (on Wangchen), like that of prominent human rights defender Liu Xiaobo, raises serious concerns about the right to freedom of expression in China," said Foreign Office minister Ivan Lewis in the statement.

"I urge the Chinese government to meet its international human rights obligations and respect constitutional guarantees on freedom of expression. International fair trial standards were not met in these cases,"

Dhondup Wangchen, aged 35, was arrested with his monk assistant named Jigme Gyatso on 26 March 2008 for making the film "Leaving Fear Behind" in Tibet, which documents the lives of Tibetans under China's rule, views about the Dalai Lama and the Beijing Olympics.

Jigme Gyatso was released on bail seven months later, on 15 October 2008, and reported that he had been tortured in detention.

Wangchen was initially detained at the Ershilibu detention center in Sining, Amdo. He was transferred a few months later to a government-run guesthouse nearby, probably for the purpose of interrogation, before being sent to the No. 1 Detention Center in Sining. Wangchen has been suffering from hepatitis B, for which he said he has been denied adequate medical treatment.

The Chinese government arbitrarily replaced the lawyer chosen by Wangchen, Li Dunyong, with a government-appointed lawyer in July 2009. The Human Rights Watch strongly condemned the move as a "violation of China's criminal procedure law and its obligations under international human rights law, which guarantee criminal defendants the right to choose their own defense counsel and to meet with their counsel while in detention".

Wangchen's lawyer, Li Dunyong reported that his client had been tortured in order to extract a confession and that some of the injuries he sustained as a result were still painful a year later. During that discussion Wangchen stated that he intended to plead not guilty and had admitted no wrongdoing during his 16 months in detention. ■

¹ To find out more about Dhondup Wangchen or to watch 'Leaving Fear Behind', visit www.leavingfearbehind.com