

**Remarks as prepared for delivery by
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at
the Asia Centre, Paris**

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**Seeking Unity Through Equality:
The Current Status of Discussions Between
His Holiness the Dalai Lama and
the Government of the People's Republic of China**

I would like to thank the Asia Centre for inviting me to share my thoughts on the current status of discussions between representatives of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Chinese government on the future of Tibet.

I am particularly glad to be here in France at a time when a new presidency is taking over. France is among those countries in Europe whose citizens have had a historical interest in Tibet, our people and our culture. France also has a small Tibetan community and several Tibet support organizations. The French parliamentary groups on Tibet are the largest such groups and have taken a number of initiatives on our issue. I have been maintaining close relationship with senior people in the French Government and they have been, in their own way, encouraging the Chinese leadership to talk with us on the future of Tibet. However, I feel with the change of the leadership in France, this is a good time for the French Government to review their approach to see if they could pursue the Tibetan issue differently for a more meaningful result.

Since 2002 the Tibetan and the Chinese sides have completed five rounds of discussions. These have gone a long way towards establishing a climate of openness that is essential to reaching mutually agreeable decisions regarding the future of the Tibetan and Chinese people. It is our belief that these discussions should continue so that we can finally resolve the problem to our mutual satisfaction. Towards this end we have been taking several initiatives to create a congenial atmosphere for the talks.

Unfortunately, I have to report to you that in recent times the Chinese side has been coming out with statements and action that not only do not contribute to the creation of such a congenial atmosphere, but are direct attempts to undermine the Tibetan position and discredit the person of the Dalai Lama. At the same time the statements and actions clearly reveal the Chinese government's concern at the lack of legitimacy of their rule in Tibet and the fear of possible separation of Tibet. It is a fact that the present Chinese system in Tibet does not have legitimacy and I can certainly understand the fear of Tibet separating from China. But what baffles me is that they are trying to confront and challenge the only person

who can, and is willing to, work with them so that a solution to Tibet can be found, which will also provide the best guarantee for the above concerns.

China and Chinese leaders have changed dramatically in the past several years. I have said publicly that the attitude of the Chinese leaders today are different from the ones that I had witnessed in the 1980s, but I cannot help feeling that when dealing with the Tibetans, the Chinese leaders still continue to have a measure of chauvinistic attitude. Old habits die slow. Our sincere and honest attempts to encourage a positive dialogue seem to be taken for granted and even being undermined. While the Chinese side feels no qualms in briefing governments and using its propaganda machinery to create a distorted image of our dialogue process¹, when we try to clarify the matter and place the factual situation before the international community we are being accused of breaching confidence or internationalization of the issue. Therefore, I will not be surprised if in the coming days the Chinese side comes out with statements citing my talk here tonight as yet another example of “internationalization.”

Many international observers do not understand the current attitude of the Chinese leadership towards His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Tibetans. Even though the Chinese Government continues to maintain that they want to dialogue with us, certain Chinese leaders have even gone to the extent of making irresponsible and most derogatory remarks against His Holiness the Dalai Lama and our dialogue process. What makes it worse is that instead of chastising these officials the senior Chinese leadership seems to be virtually supporting and protecting them. Not only that certain agencies of the Chinese Government deliberately create situations, even to the extent of looking for vested interests (including social outcasts) within and outside the Tibetan community, to thwart our efforts. We Tibetans in exile live in a free society where we have allowed access to everyone, whether from China or elsewhere, even to the level of His Holiness. This reflects the strength of a free society and the tolerance of the Tibetan community in exile and should not be perceived as a weak spot that the Chinese side could exploit.

On the other hand when it comes to our attitude, even if there is something being done by one ordinary Tibetan in exile, the whole blame for this is laid on His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

For our dialogue process to move forward and come out with mutually-beneficial results such attitude of the Chinese leadership needs to be changed.

Having said that let me assure you that His Holiness remains firmly committed to this dialogue process and has instructed me to continue our effort towards this. In his statement on March 10, 2007, commemorating the 48th anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising, His Holiness said, “The Tibetan delegation stands ready to continue the dialogue, anytime, anywhere.” If the Chinese leadership views the Tibetan issue from a proper perspective I feel there is much common ground upon which we can build our relationship.

¹ Zhang Qingli. *Dalai Lama “Deceived his Motherland”* Der Spiegel, August 16, 2006. Yang Zhen. *Dalai Lama qi tu jie “zhen zheng zi zhi” zhi ming xing bian xiang du li zhi shi (Dalai Lama Attempts to Get Independence in Disguise Under the Name of “Genuine Autonomy”)*, <http://info.tibet.cn>, April 23, 2007. Also, Yedor. *On the “Middle Way” of the Dalai Lama*. Xinhua, July 26, 2006.

It is encouraging that President Hu Jintao and his new team are focusing on the creation of a “harmonious society.” A society built on harmony is a society built on consensus and one that takes into account the needs of all its peoples. This is particularly true in a country like today’s China, which is comprised of so many distinct nationalities.

Similarly, we are encouraged by the concept of China’s “peaceful rise”, whereby it will develop as a “modern socialist country that is prosperous, democratic, and culturally advanced.”² While this philosophy candidly addresses a number of issues that confront China today, to be lasting it must take into account the aspirations of the Tibetan people; peace and stability cannot be achieved by the use of force. Embracing its diversity and protecting the identity of the Tibetan people is integral to China’s successful “peaceful rise”.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s forward-looking approach to Tibet’s future shares a common vision with these ideals of harmony and peaceful rise, as illustrated by his deep understanding of humanity’s interdependence and his philosophy of universal responsibility. In an address to the European Parliament, His Holiness said,

“Today’s world requires us to accept the oneness of humanity... The world is becoming increasingly interdependent. Within the context of this new interdependence, self-interest clearly lies in considering the interest of others. Without the cultivation of a sense of universal responsibility our very future is in danger.”³

Current Dialogue

Tonight I would like to share some of the Tibetan experiences and challenges as we seek to find a solution to the current situation in Tibet. As the lead individual designated by His Holiness the Dalai Lama to reach out to the Chinese government, my observations will hopefully contribute to the furtherance of a climate of trust and honesty, which could ultimately lead to a mutually beneficial agreement.

Ever since the re-establishment of contact between representatives of the Dalai Lama and the Chinese leadership in 2002, concerned individuals, organizations and governments have shown a keen interest in better understanding our discussions. Up until November 2006, we had resisted giving details, knowing that China prefers to operate cautiously and free of scrutiny, particularly on sensitive issues like Tibet, and recognizing that to openly discuss the dialogue could adversely impact the process. Thus, in our public statements following each of the five meetings so far, we only provided a general assessment without divulging the content of our discussions.

In recent times, however, there have been articles in the Chinese media, under a pseudonym,⁴ detailing our discussions with the Chinese leadership. Similarly, we have

² *China’s Peaceful Rise, Speeches of Zheng Bijian*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington, D.C; 2005

³ Speech of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to the European Parliament, October 14, 2001, Strasbourg, France

⁴ Zhang Qingli. *Dalai Lama “Deceived his Motherland”* Der Spiegel, August 16, 2006. Yang Zhen. *Dalai Lama qi tu jie “zhen zheng zi zhi” zhi ming xing bian xiang du li zhi shi (Dalai Lama Attempts to Get Independence in Disguise*

learned that our counterparts in the United Front Work Department of the Chinese Communist Party have been briefing foreign diplomats based in Beijing about our discussions. We do not take issue with the Chinese authorities making this information public. As a matter of fact, we would have liked our dialogue process to be as transparent as possible from the beginning. But, these developments have led to the circulation of speculative, uninformed, and one-sided information about some of the important issues at stake. Thus, it has become both necessary and useful for us to address some of the views circulating, which fail to reflect the Tibetan point of view.

The five rounds of discussions that we have had with the Chinese leadership have brought our dialogue to a new level. Today, there is a deeper understanding of each other's positions and the recognition of where the fundamental differences lie. On the surface it may appear that there have been no break-throughs and that a wide gap persists in our positions. But the very fact that the two sides have been able to explicitly state our positions after so many decades represents a significant development. How can we even attempt to make real progress unless we fully understand our differences?

Our Chinese counterparts have also remarked on the progress we have made through our discussions. Following our fourth round of meetings in July 2005 I reported that Vice Minister Zhu Weiqun “stated that we need not be pessimistic about the existing differences and that it was possible to narrow down the gaps through more meetings and exchange of views.”⁵

Tonight I will highlight several issues which are of utmost importance as we continue our dialogue with the Chinese government— His Holiness the Dalai Lama's firm commitment to a resolution that has Tibet as a part of the People's Republic of China, the need to unify all Tibetan people into one administrative entity, and the importance of granting genuine autonomy to the Tibetan people within the framework of China's Constitution.

Status of Tibet

China's lack of trust in His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan people is one of the most critical obstacles we currently face in our dialogue. To take a case in point, the Chinese side seems to believe that because His Holiness the Dalai Lama has stated that he wants to look to the future as opposed to Tibet's history to resolve its status vis-à-vis China, he has some sort of hidden agenda. This could not be farther from the truth.

Revisiting history will not serve any useful purpose, as the Tibetans and Chinese sides have different viewpoints of their past relations. We have therefore chosen to base our approach on Tibet's future, not on the past. Discussions of Tibet's history are unproductive, making it difficult for the Tibetans and Chinese alone to untangle this issue.

Under the Name of “Genuine Autonomy”), <http://info.tibet.cn>, April 23, 2007. Also, Yedor. *On the “Middle Way” of the Dalai Lama*. Xinhua, July 26, 2006.

⁵ *Statement by Special Envoy of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Kasur Lodi Gyari, Head of the Tibetan delegation for the fourth round of meetings with the Chinese leadership, Dharamsala, July 7, 2005. Zhu Weiqun is a Vice Minister in the United Front Work Department.*

In 1979 Deng Xiaoping laid down the framework for resolving the issue of Tibet by stating that other than the issue of Tibetan independence anything else could be discussed and resolved.⁶ Thus, His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said we should recognize today's reality that Tibet is a part of the People's Republic of China. He is committed to his decision that we will not raise the issue of separation from China in working on a mutually acceptable solution for Tibet.

While the Dalai Lama's Middle Way approach involves resolving the issue of Tibet within the framework of the People's Republic of China, it also embodies his deep concern for the survival of the Tibetan identity, culture, religion, and way of life. It was adopted by His Holiness after deliberating at length with Tibetan leaders in exile over many years. It is now fully endorsed by the democratically established institutions in exile, including the Assembly of Tibetan People's Deputies and the popularly elected Chairman of the Cabinet, Professor Samdhong Rinpoche. Because of prevailing conditions His Holiness is not in a position to openly seek the endorsement of the Tibetans inside Tibet. Nevertheless, he has used every opportunity to explain his approach and has received favorable reactions from all levels of Tibetan society. He has also been encouraged by the strong support expressed by a number of Chinese intellectuals and scholars.

The Middle Way approach represents the Dalai Lama's commitment to look to the future, instead of the past, to find a solution that will provide maximum autonomy for the Tibetan people and bring peace and stability to the People's Republic of China and the entire region.

Unification of Tibetan People

Since His Holiness the Dalai Lama has addressed the fundamental concern of the Chinese government about the status of Tibet, it is our expectation that they should reciprocate by acknowledging the legitimate needs of the Tibetan people.

Today, the Tibet Autonomous Region includes less than half of the Tibetan people. The rest reside in Tibetan autonomous counties and prefectures in Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan provinces. All Tibetans residing in these Tibetan areas share the same language, ethnicity, culture, and tradition.⁷ Furthermore, just as the Chinese nation has sought to unify many different regions into one nation, the Tibetan people, too, yearn to be unified under one administrative entity.

Historically the division of a nationality area into many administrative units contributed to the weakening and erosion of that nationality's unique characteristics, as well as its ability to grow and develop. Such a situation is in contradiction to the founding goals of the People's Republic of China, namely the recognition of the equality of all nationalities. Thus in order

⁶ This assurance was conveyed by Deng Xiaoping to Gyalo Thondup, the brother of H.H. the Dalai Lama, in 1979. It was restated to Gyalo Thondup by Ding Guangen, head of the United Front Work Department of the Chinese Communist Party, during their meeting in Beijing on June 22, 1992.

⁷ *White Paper on Tibetan Culture*. Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China. June 22, 2000

to thrive, the Tibetan people cannot remain divided, but must be accorded the equality and respect befitting a distinct people.

The Chinese side makes the argument that the present-day Tibet Autonomous Region parallels the area under the former Tibetan government. Thus, their argument continues, our position that the entire Tibetan people need to be unified into a single entity is unreasonable. This question will lead us inevitably to the examination of Tibet's historical legal status under the Tibetan government and will not help in reaching a common ground on which to build a common future. China has redrawn internal boundaries when it has suited its needs⁸ and could do so again in the case of Tibet to foster stability and to help ensure Tibet's characteristics remain intact.

The Chinese side is also characterizing our position as a demand for the separation of one-fourth the territory of China. First of all, since the Tibetans are not asking for the separation of Tibet from China, there should be no concern on this front. More importantly, it is a fact both of history and geography that the landmass inhabited by Tibetans constitutes roughly one-fourth the territory of the People's Republic of China. Actually, the Chinese government has already designated almost all Tibetan areas as Tibet autonomous entities: the Tibet Autonomous Region, Tibet Autonomous Prefectures or Tibet Autonomous Counties.⁹ Thus, our positions on what constitutes Tibet are really not so divergent.

Unifying the Tibetan people should not be seen as an effort to create a "greater" Tibet, nor is it a cover for a separatist plot. It is a question of recognizing, restoring and respecting the integrity of the Tibetans as a people and distinct nationality within the People's Republic of China. Furthermore, this is not a new or revolutionary idea. From the beginning, the Tibetans have raised this issue and representatives of the Chinese government have recognized it as one that must be addressed. In fact during the signing of the 17 Point Agreement in 1951, Premier Chou En Lai acknowledged that the idea of unification of the Tibetan nationalities was appropriate.¹⁰ Similarly, in 1956 Vice Premier Chen Yi was in Lhasa and said that it would be good for Tibet's development as well as for the friendship of Tibetans and Chinese if in the future the Tibet Autonomous Region included all ethnic Tibetan areas, including those now in other provinces.¹¹

The Tibetan people are striving for the right of a distinct people to be able to live together and to preserve that very distinctiveness through a unified administrative entity. This unification would give the Tibetans a genuine sense of having benefited by being part of the

⁸ In 1954 Baicheng city was moved from Heilongjiang Province to Jilin Province. In 1955 Xikang Province (a Tibetan area) was divided into two and merged with the Tibet Autonomous Region and Sichuan Province. In 1988 Hainan Province was created after separating it from Guangdong Province and in 1997 Chongqing Municipality was created out of Chongqing City and surrounding areas in Sichuan Province.

⁹ *Administrative Division of Tibetan Areas*. Website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. www.fmprc.gov.cn.

¹⁰ Ngapo Ngawang Jigme's conversation with Chinese leader Chou En-Lai in May 1951. This was confirmed by China's leader Ulan Fu to Tibetan official Phuntsok Tashi Takla during their meeting in Beijing on May 29, 1982.

¹¹ Goldstein, Sherap, Siebenschuh. *A Tibetan Revolutionary, The Political Life and Times of Bapa Phuntso Wangye*, University of California Press, 2004. p 206. Chen Yi was leading the Central government's delegation to launch the Preparatory Committee for the establishment of the Tibet Autonomous Region.

People's Republic of China and would embody the respect for the integrity of the Tibetans as a distinct people.

Genuine Autonomy

According to the Chinese Constitution, the Law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy¹² as well as the White Paper on Regional Ethnic Autonomy in Tibet¹³, the Tibetan people are entitled to the following rights: full political right of autonomy; full decision-making power in economic and social development undertakings; freedom to inherit and develop their traditional culture and to practice their religious belief; and freedom to administer, protect and be the first to utilize their natural resources, to independently develop their educational and cultural undertakings.

Similarly, the Chinese Constitution says:

“All nationalities in the People's Republic of China are equal. The state protects the lawful rights and interests of the minority nationalities and upholds and develops the relationship of equality, unity and mutual assistance among all of China's nationalities... Regional autonomy is practiced in areas where people of minority nationalities live in compact communities, in these areas organs of self-government are established for the exercise of the right of autonomy.”¹⁴

In treating the Tibetan people with respect and dignity through genuine autonomy, China has the opportunity to create a truly multi-ethnic, harmonious state without a tremendous cost in human suffering. As Hu Yaobang, then General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, said:

"It is not possible to achieve a genuine unity amongst the nationalities of the country as long as complete autonomy is not implemented in the areas of the minority nationalities..."¹⁵

Some detractors in the Chinese leadership allege that our proposal for the unification of the Tibetan people and the implementation of genuine regional autonomy as provided in the Constitution is really an effort to restore Tibet's former system of government in Tibet today, or an effort by His Holiness the Dalai Lama to personally regain power over all of Tibet. Nothing is farther from the truth. In his 2005 March 10 statement His Holiness reiterated his position saying,

"My involvement in the affairs of Tibet is not for the purpose of claiming certain personal rights or political position for myself nor attempting to stake claims for the Tibetan administration in exile. In 1992 in a formal announcement I stated clearly that

¹² *People's Republic of China Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law*. Issued by the Second Session of the Sixth National People's Congress on May 31, 1984 (effective October 1, 1984) and amended at the 12th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Ninth National People's Congress on February 28, 2001.

¹³ *Regional Ethnic Autonomy in Tibet* issued by the Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China on May 23, 2004, Beijing.

¹⁴ Article 4, Constitution of the People's Republic of China, adopted on December 4, 1982.

¹⁵ Speech by Hu Yaobang in Lhasa, May 1980.

when we return to Tibet with a certain degree of freedom I will not hold any office in the Tibetan government or any other political position and that the present Tibetan administration in exile will be dissolved. Moreover, the Tibetans working in Tibet should carry on the main responsibility of administering Tibet."¹⁶

The task at hand is to develop a system that would grant the kind of autonomy required for the Tibetans to be able to survive as a distinct and prosperous people within the People's Republic of China. So far in our discussions with our Chinese counterparts we have not proposed specific labels for how Tibetan areas would be designated, such as special administrative areas, or "one country, two systems", although it should be noted that the Chinese-authored 17 Point Agreement¹⁷ does propose a similar arrangement for Tibet. Nor have we specifically proposed formulas that ask for higher or lower levels of autonomy than Hong Kong and Macao. Each of these areas has its unique characteristics, and in order to succeed, their solutions must reflect the needs and qualities of the region. We have specifically conveyed to our counterparts that we place more importance on discussing the substance than on the label.

The Tibetans have the legitimate right to seek special status, as can be seen in the following quote by Ngapo Ngawang Jigme. He is the senior most Tibetan in China's hierarchy who, by virtue of his position, has endorsed many of China's views on Tibet. In 1988 he said,

"It is because of the special situation in Tibet that in 1951 the Seventeen Point Agreement on the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet, between the central people's government and the local Tibetan government, came about. Such an agreement has never existed between the central government and any other minority regions. We have to consider the special situation in Tibetan history while drafting policies for Tibet in order to realize its long-term stability. We must give Tibet more autonomous power than other minority regions. In my view, at present, Tibetan Autonomous Region has relatively less power of autonomy compared with other autonomous regions, let alone compared with provinces. Therefore Tibet must have some special treatment and have more autonomy like those special economic zones. We must employ special policies to resolve the special characteristics which have pertained throughout history."¹⁸

Other important Tibetan leaders, including the late Panchen Lama¹⁹ and Bapa Phuntsok Wangyal,²⁰ have strongly advocated the legitimacy of Tibet's special status. Similarly, the

¹⁶ *The Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the 46th Anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising Day, March 10, 2005*, Department of information & International Relations, Central Tibetan Administration, Dharamsala.

¹⁷ The 17-point Agreement was signed on May 23, 1951 by representatives of the Tibetan and Chinese Governments. In the agreement, the suzerainty of China was accepted but it also stated that Tibet would be able to continue full self-governance, including the continuation of the government system under the Dalai Lama. From 1951 to 1959 the Dalai Lama did his best to abide by this Chinese-authored agreement, but the Chinese Government breached the agreement, forcing him to seek asylum in India.

¹⁸ Apei Awang Jinmei (Ngapo Ngawang Jigme). "When did Tibet come Within the Sovereignty of China", *Bulletin of the History of the Tibet Communist Party*, Volume 3, 1988 (General Series No. 21), published in translation in *Background Papers on Tibet*, Tibet Information Network, London; 1992.

¹⁹ 70,000-character petition by the Panchen Lama to the Chinese Government, May 1962.

²⁰ Goldstein, Sherap, Siebenschuh. *A Tibetan Revolutionary, The Political Life and Times of Bapa Phuntso Wangye*, University of California Press, 2004.

former General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, Hu Yaobang, had acknowledged that Tibet is unique from other autonomous regions and provinces and has argued that the validity of Tibet's special status must not be contested.

There are some issues, which are based on misperceptions of His Holiness's views by the Chinese side, including the allegation that His Holiness the Dalai Lama is asking for all Tibetan areas to be populated solely by Tibetans and to be rid of the People's Liberation Army. The Chinese government has misinterpreted His Holiness' concerns in these areas, just as they denounce any effort to manifest the Tibetan identity as separatist and blame His Holiness for orchestrating outcries in the international community about human rights violations in Tibet. His Holiness has very honestly expressed the need for the Tibetan people to maintain their distinctive way of life and protect Tibet's fragile environment. He has had this in mind when he raises concerns about the large influx of people from other parts of the People's Republic of China and the extensive militarization of Tibetan areas. We are fully aware that these are issues of concern to the Chinese government as these matters have been extensively discussed during our meetings. I am confident that through the negotiations process we will be able to dispel these concerns.

Benefits of Resolving the Tibet Issue Now

The Dalai Lama is widely recognized for his honesty and integrity. He has been pragmatic and flexible in wanting to negotiate with China's representatives on the kind of status Tibet should enjoy in the future and has held steadfast to his commitment to non-violence and dialogue as the only logical means of resolving the issue of Tibet.

Every Tibetan, including ardent communist cadres who work within the Chinese system as well as independence advocates, reveres His Holiness. It is a fact today that in spite of their deep bitterness and opposition to China's policies, the Tibetans have not resorted to violence. This is largely because of the influence of the Dalai Lama and the hope he provides to his people.

The Dalai Lama's world view, his special bond with the Tibetan people and the respect he enjoys in the international community all make the person of the Dalai Lama key both to achieving a negotiated solution to the Tibetan issue and to peacefully implementing any agreement that is reached. This is why we have consistently conveyed to our Chinese counterparts that far from being the problem, His Holiness is the solution to developing a lasting and implementable solution for Tibet.

Some Chinese leaders seem to believe that the aspirations of the Tibetan people will fizzle out once the Dalai Lama passes away. This is a most dangerous approach. Certainly, the absence of the Dalai Lama would be devastating for the Tibetan people. But more importantly his absence would mean that China would be left to handle the problem without the presence of a leader who enjoys the loyalty of the entire community and who remains firmly committed to non-violence. It is certain that the Tibetan position would become more intractable in his absence, and that having had their beloved leader pass away in exile would create deep and lasting wounds in the hearts of the Tibetan people.

In the absence of the Dalai Lama, while a section of the Tibetan people might be reconciled to the status quo, there is no way that the entire population would be able to contain their resentment and anger. And it only takes a few desperate individuals or groups to create major instability. This is not a threat, but a statement of fact.

The Tibetan people's complete trust in the Dalai Lama is key to reaching a negotiated solution with the People's Republic of China. His moral authority will also be the key to the implementation of any agreement that is reached, and his international stature will go a long way to encourage China to honor its commitments.

Providing autonomy to the Tibetan people, under a single administration, is in China's interest as it makes efforts to create a peaceful, stable and harmonious state. But resolving the Tibetan issue is also important to the international community, particularly to our region. The historically volatile Central Asian region has revived and has already become an area of conflict. Here Tibet can play a stabilizing role, which is important to the countries in the region such as India, China, and Russia, as well as to the United States and other countries. Tibet, which for centuries played the vital role as a buffer in the region, can help create a more cohesive region. Thus, Tibet can turn from a buffer to a bridge. A number of political observers from the region also acknowledge that resolving the Tibet issue is an important factor in the normalization of India-China relations.²¹ Understanding the great mutual benefit for all concerned, His Holiness has consistently supported closer India-China relations.

There is also increased awareness of the vital importance of the Tibetan plateau from the environmental perspective. Just on the issue of water alone, it is an undeniable fact that over the next few decades water may become as scarce a commodity as oil. Tibet is literally the life-source of the region, serving as the source of most of Asia's major rivers. Therefore, protecting Tibet's fragile environment should be accorded the highest priority.

Conclusion

To date, the Chinese authorities have used force and intimidation to stifle the Tibetan people. This is clearly demonstrated by some of the recent actions by the top Chinese Communist Party leader in Tibet as well as the continued denial of religious freedom and other human rights to the Tibetan people. These actions can not only harm the sincere efforts by both sides for a mutually beneficial settlement, but also create embarrassment and even harm the prestige of the People's Republic of China. Instead, a negotiated political solution based on mutual interests will be much more effective in bringing stability to Tibet and the region.

As my colleague, Envoy Kelsang Gyaltzen, and I have conveyed to our Chinese counterparts during our meetings, the task before us is not impossible. The seemingly insurmountable gaps between us can be diminished through honest discourse and hard work. With His

²¹ Rabgye, Sharlho. *Sino-Tibetan Dialogue in the Post-Mao Era: Lessons and Prospects*. Policy Studies No. 12, East-West Center, USA; 2004. p.29. It refers to Beijing University academics' presentation at the Fourth Work Forum on Tibet in 2001 "that rapprochement with the Dalai Lama would reduce China's strategic risks in the volatile region of the Indian subcontinent."

Holiness' unambiguous commitment to the integrity and sovereignty of the People's Republic of China, China's leaders must recognize the aspirations of the Tibetans to survive as a distinct, unified people, a commitment that is already enshrined in China's laws.

We have no illusions that coming to a negotiated solution will be easy. Having identified each others' position and differences, it is now our sincere hope that both sides can start making serious efforts to find a common ground and to build trust . In furtherance of this goal His Holiness has made the offer to go personally to China on a pilgrimage.²² This has met with considerable opposition from Tibetans, both inside and outside Tibet, as well as from friends in the international community who are not convinced of China's sincerity. But His Holiness felt, and continues to feel, that he wants to do everything he can to dispel the climate of mistrust that continues to exist.

We fully support China's effort to create a harmonious society as well as its aspirations for a peaceful rise.²³ After all, its successful, peaceful rise will depend on internal stability, which makes it critical that the Tibet issue be resolved. The People's Republic of China is a multi-ethnic state whose internal diversity cannot be ignored. And in looking forward to finding a solution for Tibet, it is clearly in China's best interest to have the Tibetan people accept their place within the People's Republic of China of their own free will.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan people are deeply grateful for the outpouring of interest and support from the international community. It is an invaluable source of inspiration. At the same time, we are fully aware that ultimately the issue needs to be resolved directly between the Tibetans and Chinese. It is my sincere hope that the day will come soon when His Holiness the Dalai Lama can come to you with his usual humble, Buddhist gesture of folded hands to thank you, instead of seeking your help.

I also wanted to share with you that my delegation has received the warmest hospitality and the highest courtesy from every level of the Chinese government during our visits. Similarly the personal conduct of our counterparts has been exemplary.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has a vision of the Tibetans being able to live in harmony within the People's Republic of China. Today's China was born out of an historical movement for the people's self-determination and the Constitution asserts that it is based on principles of equality. Let us build our relations on this equality and give the Tibetan people the dignity to freely and willingly be a part of this nation. We cannot re-write history, but together we can determine the future.

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²² *The Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the 47th Anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising Day*, March 10, 2006, Department of information & International Relations, Central Tibetan Administration, Dharamsala.

²³ *The Statement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the 48th Anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising Day*, March 10, 2007, Department of information & International Relations, Central Tibetan Administration, Dharamsala.
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