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at
the Center for Strategic and International Studies,
Washington, D.C.

March 5, 2010

The Way Forward on Tibet

The 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 Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) for providing this opportunity to talk about the status of our discussions with the Chinese government following the Ninth Round of talks held in January this year.

The Ninth Round came after a gap of 15 months and took place in between two developments connected with President Obama: his first visit to China in November 2009 and his meeting with His Holiness the Dalai Lama in February this year. It also took place some days after the significant Fifth Tibet Work Forum session held by the Chinese Government. All these had and will have implications on the Tibetan dialogue process.

Through our talks, for the first time after decades of being in and out of contact, we have been able to convey to the Chinese leadership in an unambiguous manner the position of His Holiness and the steps that need to be taken to resolve the Tibetan problem. Our talks have certainly enabled us to understand better the Chinese government's position and concerns regarding the future of Tibet.

This time we met with Mr. Du Qinglin, Vice Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference as well as Minister of the Central United Front Work Department, on January 30. We also had a day-long discussion with Executive Vice Minister Zhu Weiqun and Vice Minister Sithar on January 31, 2010.

We presented a Note¹ relating to the Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan People² that we had presented during the Eighth Round in November 2008. The Chinese Government has made different comments and expression of concerns regarding the Memorandum and the Note was intended to address these and to offer some constructive suggestions for a way forward in the dialogue process. The Note was also intended to prevent the chance of misinterpretation and misconception by the general public.

The Note contained the following seven points:

¹ See full text on www.tibet.net

² See full text on www.tibet.net

1. Respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the People's Republic of China

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has repeatedly and categorically stated that he is not seeking separation of Tibet from the People's Republic of China (PRC). He is seeking a sustainable solution within the People's Republic of China. This position is stated unambiguously in the Memorandum.

The form and degree of autonomy proposed in the Memorandum is consistent with the principles on autonomy in the Chinese Constitution. Observers of the situation, including unbiased political leaders and scholars in the international community, have also acknowledged that the Memorandum is a call for autonomy within the People's Republic of China.

The Chinese Government's viewpoint on the history of Tibet is different from that of the Tibetans and His Holiness the Dalai Lama is fully aware that Tibetans cannot agree to it. History is a past event and it cannot be altered. However, His Holiness the Dalai Lama's position is forward-looking, not backward grasping. He does not wish to make this difference on history an obstacle in seeking a mutually beneficial common future within the People's Republic of China.

2. Respecting the Constitution of the PRC

The fundamental principle underlying the concept of national regional autonomy is to preserve and protect a minority nationality's identity, language, custom, tradition and culture in a multi-national state based on equality and cooperation. The Constitution provides for the establishment of organs of self-government where the national minorities live in concentrated communities in order for them to exercise the power of autonomy. In conformity with this principle, the Chinese Government's White Paper on Regional Ethnic Autonomy in Tibet,³ states that minority nationalities are "arbiters of their own destiny and masters of their own affairs".

Within the parameters of its underlying principles, a Constitution needs to be responsive to the needs of the times and adapt to new or changed circumstances. The Chinese leaders have demonstrated the flexibility of the Constitution in their interpretation and implementation of it, and have also enacted modifications and amendments in response to changing circumstances. If applied to the Tibetan situation, such flexibility would, as is stated in the Memorandum, indeed permit the accommodation of the Tibetan needs within the framework of the Constitution and its principles on autonomy.

3. Respecting the 'Three Adherences'⁴

During our Eighth Round in November 2008, the Chinese side came up with the principles of Three Adherences related to our dialogue process.

³ White Paper, Regional Ethnic Autonomy in Tibet, State Council Information Office, Beijing, May 23, 2004.

⁴ The Three Adherences are: Adherences to (1) the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party; (2) the socialism with Chinese characteristics; and (3) the Regional National Autonomy system.

The position of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, as presented in the Memorandum, in no way challenges or brings into question the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. At the same time, it is reasonable to expect that, in order to promote unity, stability and a harmonious society, the Party would change its attitude of treating Tibetan culture, religion and identity as a threat.

The Memorandum also does not challenge the socialist system of the PRC. Nothing in it suggests a demand for a change to this system or for its exclusion from Tibetan areas.

4. Respecting the hierarchy and authority of the Chinese Central Government

The proposals contained in the Memorandum in no way imply a denial of the authority of the National People's Congress (NPC) and other organs of the Chinese Central Government. The proposal fully respects the hierarchical differences between the Central Government and its organs, including the NPC, and the autonomous government of Tibet.

Any form of genuine autonomy entails a division and allocation of powers and responsibilities, including that of making laws and regulations, between the central and the autonomous local government. Of course, the power to adopt laws and regulations is limited to the areas of competency of the autonomous region. This is true in unitary states as well as in federal systems.

This principle is also recognized in the Constitution. The spirit of the Constitutional provisions on autonomy is to give autonomous regions broader decision-making authority over and above that enjoyed by ordinary provinces. But today, the requirement for prior approval by the Standing Committee of the NPC for all laws and regulations of the autonomous regions (Art. 116 of the Constitution) is exercised in a way that in fact leaves the autonomous regions with much less authority to make decisions that suit local conditions than that of the ordinary (not autonomous) provinces of China.

The important feature of entrenchment of autonomy arrangements in the Constitution or in other appropriate ways also does not imply equality of status between the central and local government nor does it restrict or weaken the authority of the former. The measure is intended to provide (legal) security to both the autonomous and the central authorities that neither can unilaterally change the basic features of the autonomy they have set up, and that a process of consultation must take place at least for fundamental changes to be enacted.

5. Concerns raised by the Chinese Central Government on specific competencies referred to in the Memorandum

a) Public security

Concern was raised over the inclusion of public security aspects in the package of competencies allocated to the autonomous region in the Memorandum because the government apparently interpreted this to mean defense matters. National defense and public security are two different matters. His Holiness the Dalai Lama is clear on the point that the responsibility for national defense of the PRC is and should remain with the Central

Government. The Memorandum in fact refers specifically to “internal public order and security,” and makes the important point that the majority of the security personnel should be Tibetans, because they understand the local customs and traditions. It also helps to curb local incidents leading to disharmony among the nationalities. The Memorandum in this respect is consistent with the principle enunciated in Article 120 of the Chinese Constitution (reflected also in Article 24 of the Law on Regional National Autonomy), which states:

“The organs of self-government of the national autonomous areas may, in accordance with the military system of the state and practical local needs and with approval of the State Council, organize local public security forces for the maintenance of public order.”

It should also be emphasized that nowhere in the Memorandum do we propose the withdrawal of People’s Liberation Army (PLA) from Tibetan areas.

b) Language

The protection, use, and development of the Tibetan language are some of the crucial issues for the exercise of genuine autonomy by Tibetans. Our emphasis on the need to respect Tibetan as the main or principal language in the Tibetan areas is not different from the position expressed in the Chinese Government’s White Paper on Regional Ethnic Autonomy in Tibet, where it is stated that regulations adopted by the Tibet regional government prescribe that “equal attention be given to Tibetan and Han-Chinese languages in the Tibetan Autonomous region, with the Tibetan language as the major one...” (emphasis added). Moreover, the very usage of “main language” in the Memorandum clearly implies the use of other languages, too.

The absence of a demand in the Memorandum that the Chinese language should also be used and taught should not be interpreted as its “exclusion”. Chinese is the principal and common language in the PRC as a whole and it should also be noted in this context that the leadership in exile has taken steps to encourage Tibetans in exile to learn Chinese.

Therefore, our proposal emphasizing the study of the Tibetan people’s own language should not be interpreted as being a “separatist view”.

c) Regulation of population migration

The Memorandum proposes that the local government of the autonomous region should have the competency to regulate the residence, settlement and employment or economic activities of persons who wish to move to Tibetan areas from elsewhere. This is a common feature of autonomy and is certainly not without precedent in the PRC.

The Memorandum explicitly states that it is not suggesting the expulsion of non-Tibetans who have lived in Tibetan areas for years. His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Kashag (the Tibetan cabinet) also made this clear in earlier statements, as did we in our discussions with our Chinese counterparts. In an address to the European Parliament on December 4, 2008, His Holiness reiterated 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 environment.” The issue concerns the appropriate division of powers regarding the regulation of transient, seasonal workers and new settlers so as to protect the vulnerable population indigenous to Tibetan areas.

The Chinese Government rejected the proposition that the autonomous authorities would regulate the entrance and economic activities of persons from other parts of the PRC in part because “in the Constitution and the Law on Regional National Autonomy there are no provisions to restrict transient population.” In fact, the Law on Regional National Autonomy, in its Article 43, explicitly mandates such a regulation:

“In accordance with legal stipulations, the organs of self-government of national autonomous areas shall work out measures for control of the transient population.”

d) Religion

The point made in the Memorandum, that Tibetans be free to practice their religion according to their own beliefs, is entirely consistent with the principles of religious freedom contained in the Chinese Constitution. It is also consistent with the principle of separation of religion and polity adopted in many countries of the world.

Article 36 of the Constitution guarantees that no one can “compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in any religion.” We endorse this principle but observe that today the authorities do interfere in important ways in the ability of Tibetans to practice their religion.

The spiritual relationship between master and student and the giving of religious teachings, etc. are essential components of the religious practice. Restricting these is a violation of religious freedom. Similarly, the interference and direct involvement by the state and its institutions in matters of recognition of reincarnated lamas, as provided in the Regulation on the Management of Reincarnated Lamas of 2007⁵ is a grave violation of the freedom of religious belief enshrined in the Constitution.

The practice of religion is widespread and fundamental to the Tibetan people. Rather than seeing Buddhist practice as a threat, concerned authorities should respect it. Traditionally or historically Buddhism has always been a major unifying and positive factor between the Tibetan and Chinese peoples.

e) Single administration

The desire of Tibetans to be governed within one autonomous region is fully in keeping with the principles on autonomy of the Constitution. The rationale for the need to respect the integrity of the Tibetan nationality is clearly stated in the Memorandum and does not mean “Greater” or “Smaller” Tibet. In fact, the Law on Regional National Autonomy itself allows for this kind of modification of administrative boundaries if proper procedures are followed.. Terming this proposal as a “territorial claim” is unfounded. This is a genuine need and

⁵ State Administration of Religious Affairs Order No. 5, “Management measures for the reincarnation of living Buddhas in Tibetan Buddhism” adopted by the Administrative Affairs Conference of the State Administration of Religious Affairs, Beijing, on July 13, 2007 and implemented from September 1, 2007.

desire of a distinctive people to pursue their legitimate right and aspiration through legal and constitutional means. This proposal in no way violates the Constitution

As we pointed out in earlier rounds of talks, many Chinese leaders, including Premier Zhou Enlai, Vice Premier Chen Yi and Party Secretary Hu Yaobang, supported the consideration of bringing all Tibetan areas under a single administration. Some of the most senior Tibetan leaders in the PRC, including the 10th Panchen Lama, Ngapo Ngawang Jigme and Bapa Phuntsok Wangyal have also called for this and affirming that doing so would be in accordance with the PRC's Constitution and its laws. In 1956 a special committee, which included senior Communist Party member Sangye Yeshe (Tian Bao), was appointed by the Chinese Government to make a detailed plan for the integration of the Tibetan areas into a single autonomous region, but the work was later stopped on account of ultra-leftist elements.

The fundamental reason for the need to integrate the Tibetan areas under one administrative region is to address the deeply-felt desire of Tibetans to exercise their autonomy as a people and to protect and develop their culture and spiritual values in this context. This is also the fundamental premise and purpose of the Constitutional principles on regional national autonomy as reflected in Article 4 of the Constitution. Tibetans are concerned about the integrity of the Tibetan nationality, which the proposal respects and which the continuation of the present system does not. Their common historical heritage, spiritual and cultural identity, language and even their particular affinity to the unique Tibetan plateau environment is what binds Tibetans as one nationality. Within the PRC, Tibetans are recognized as one nationality and not several nationalities. Those Tibetans presently living in Tibet autonomous prefectures and counties incorporated into other provinces also belong to the same Tibetan nationality. Tibetans, including His Holiness the Dalai Lama, are primarily concerned about the protection and development of Tibetan culture, spiritual values, national identity and the environment.

Tibetans are not asking for the expansion of Tibetan autonomous areas, but are only asking that those areas already recognized as Tibetan autonomous areas by PRC come under a single administration, as is the case in the other autonomous regions. It is possible for the Chinese Government to make the necessary administrative adjustment when elsewhere in the PRC, notably in the case of Inner Mongolia, Ningxia and Guangxi Autonomous Regions, it has done just that.

Today more than half of the Tibetan population is subjected to the priorities and interests first and foremost of different provincial governments in which they have no significant role. Keeping Tibetans divided and subject to different laws and regulations denies the people the exercise of genuine autonomy and makes it difficult for them to maintain their distinct cultural identity.

f) Political, social and economic system

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has repeatedly and consistently stated that he has no intention to restore the old political, social and economic system that existed in Tibet prior to 1959. It is disturbing and puzzling that the Chinese government persists, despite all evidence to the

contrary, to accuse His Holiness the Dalai Lama and his Administration of the intention to restore the old system.

All countries and societies, including China, have had political systems in the past that would be entirely unacceptable today. The old Tibetan system is no exception. Tibetans in exile have developed their own modern democratic system as well as education and health systems and institutions. It is obvious that Tibetans in the PRC have also advanced under Chinese rule and improved their social, education, health and economic situation. However, the standard of living of the Tibetan people remains the lowest in the PRC and Tibetan human rights are not being respected. Our firm commitment to respect the Three Adherences as conveyed in the Note should put to rest any such doubts if they existed.

6. Recognizing the core issue

His Holiness the Dalai Lama and other members of the exiled leadership have no personal demands to make. His Holiness the Dalai Lama's concern is with the rights and welfare of the Tibetan people. Therefore, the fundamental issue that needs to be resolved is the faithful implementation of genuine autonomy that will enable the Tibetan people to govern themselves in accordance with their own genius and needs.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama speaks on behalf of the Tibetan people, with whom he has a deep and historical relationship and one based on full trust. In fact, on no issue are Tibetans as completely in agreement as on their demand for the return of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to Tibet. It cannot be disputed that His Holiness the Dalai Lama legitimately represents the Tibetan people, and he is certainly viewed as their true representative and spokesperson by them. It is indeed only by means of dialogue with His Holiness the Dalai Lama that the Tibetan issue can be resolved. The recognition of this reality is important.

This emphasizes the point, often made by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, that his engagement for the cause of Tibet is not for the purpose of claiming certain personal rights or political position for him, nor attempting to stake claims for the Tibetan administration in exile. Once an agreement is reached, the Tibetan Government-in-Exile will be dissolved and the Tibetans working in Tibet should carry on the main responsibility of administering Tibet. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has made it clear on numerous occasions that he will not hold any political position in Tibet.

7. The Way Forward

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has offered, and remains prepared, to formally issue a statement that would serve to allay the Chinese Central Government's doubts and concerns as to his position and intentions on matters that have been identified above.

The formulation of the statement should be done after ample consultations between representatives of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Chinese Central Government, respectively, to ensure that such a statement would satisfy the fundamental needs of the Chinese Central Government as well as those of the Tibetan people.

Other Important Issues

During the Ninth Round, we also conveyed two other suggestions that would enable our dialogue process to move forward.

We emphasized that His Holiness' sole concern is the wellbeing of the six million Tibetans in Tibet. We stated that we have never raised any personal issues of His Holiness the Dalai Lama or the welfare of the few people around him.

With regard to this, the Chinese Government contends that most of the Tibetan people are in a happy and satisfactory situation, and that there is no Tibetan issue. Our perception is that most of the Tibetans are in a situation where they face limitless suffering and where they do not have a satisfactory religious, political, economic, language and culture, and social situation. In the light of these two differing perspectives, we suggested that there be a study by the two sides to determine the reality of the situation. This study needs to be undertaken under a situation where all the Tibetans can have the opportunity to participate without fear or suspicion. The two sides could mutually decide the practical ways to implement this. If the outcome of this study is that most of the Tibetans feel there is no problem and their present situation is satisfactory, that is what His Holiness the Dalai Lama is calling for. But if the outcome confirms that most of the Tibetan people are not in a satisfactory situation, the Chinese Government then needs to recognize that there is a problem in the spirit of seeking truth from facts, and both sides need to discuss and together find a solution.

We also stated that during the informal session in Shenzhen in May 2008, we had rejected the allegation (made in the form of the "Three Stops" principles⁶) that His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the leadership in exile have instigated the demonstrations throughout the Tibetan areas since March 10, 2008 as they were without basis. Therefore, during the Seventh Round of talks, we felt that the Chinese Government accepted the reality by altering the "Three Stops" to "Four Not to Support."⁷

However, in recent times we find that the same earlier allegations are being repeated. Therefore, we conveyed our feeling that the Chinese Government needed to clarify whether its position is what that was stated to us in the Seventh Round of talks. If there is a change, then the Chinese Government needs to undertake a thorough scientific investigation, in Tibet as well as in the Tibetan community in exile, into the veracity of their charge. We stated our readiness to extend every support to this investigation.

We called upon the Chinese side to stop the baseless accusations against His Holiness and, instead, work with him to find a mutually acceptable solution to the Tibetan problem based on the Memorandum. This will ensure stability, unity and the development of a harmonious society.

Some Important Issues Raised by the Chinese Side

⁶ The three stops are: 1) stop separatist activities, 2) stop violence, and 3) stop sabotaging the Beijing Olympic Games.

⁷ The four not to support are: 1) not supporting activities that would disturb the Beijing Olympic Games; 2) not supporting plots inciting violent criminal activities; 3) not supporting and concretely curbing violent terrorist activities; and 4) not supporting activities seeking Tibetan independence.

The Chinese side came up with a four “Not to Indulge In” or “Four No’s”⁸ principles, namely, 1) The national interests must not be violated, 2) the principles of the Constitution must not be infringed, 3) the national dignity must not be damaged, and 4) the universal desires of various ethnic groups of the people must not be defied. These are somewhat different from their earlier “Three Stops” and “Four Not to Support” principles.

The Chinese side also provided us with a detailed briefing on recent developments relating to Tibet, particularly on the important Fifth Tibet Work Forum, held from January 18 to 20, 2010. They said the Forum decided to further improve the livelihood of Tibetans in the Tibet Autonomous Region and all Tibetan areas, specifically in public services, such as education, medical services, and environmental protection. Based on the initial reports that we had of the Forum, we welcomed the issues it has taken up to improve the lives of the Tibetan people specially in rural areas.

We welcome the fact that the Fifth Tibet Work Forum has looked into the issues of development in all Tibetan areas – The Tibet Autonomous Region as well as other Tibetan areas. It is our strong belief that all the Tibetan areas must be under a uniform policy and a single administration. 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.

All the five work forums held so far have resulted in major change in China’s attitude towards the Tibetan people. The First Forum was held in 1980 and dealt with economic development and special policies; the second was held in 1984 and took up economic development and assistance from other provinces to the Tibet Autonomous Region. The third Forum took place in 1994 and it was during this Forum that the decision seems to have been taken to look at His Holiness personally as an adversary. This Forum continued looking at economic development as well as stability issues. The Fourth Forum was held in 2001 and took up economic development, stability as well as intensifying of control mechanisms in the Tibet Autonomous Region. The Fifth Work Forum has taken up the economic development issue but also involved environmental protection and development of rural and nomadic regions. Above all, as mentioned earlier, it has considered a common developmental approach to all Tibetan areas for the first time.

The Essence of the Dalai Lama’s Middle Way Approach

One of the fundamental points that the Chinese officials fail to formally acknowledge is the fact that His Holiness the Dalai Lama is sincere and serious in his efforts for a solution within the framework of the People’s Republic of China through his Middle Way Approach.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan leadership in exile took the courageous decision to seek genuine autonomy for the Tibetan people within the framework of the

⁸ The Four Not to Indulge In are: 1) The national interests must not be violated, 2) the principles of the Constitution must not be infringed, 3) the national dignity must not be damaged, and 4) the universal desires of various ethnic groups of the people must not be defied.

Constitution of the PRC in a way that would ensure the basic needs of the Tibetan people in safeguarding their distinct culture, language, religion and identity and the delicate natural environment of the Tibetan plateau.

The Middle Way Approach is a way to peacefully resolve the issue of Tibet and to bring about stability and co-existence between the Tibetan and Chinese peoples based on equality and mutual co-operation. Its origin goes back to the mid 1970s when His Holiness had internal discussions with his advisors. Over the years the Tibetan leadership in exile refined the concrete features of the Approach to conform to existing political realities in the PRC. With the re-establishment of contact in 2002, we have been able to convey directly to the Chinese leadership, both verbally and in writing, the essence of the Approach.

Official Chinese media continue to label His Holiness as being a separatist and wanting to regain Tibetan independence and referring to contents of his statements of the past, including the Five Point Peace Plan and the Strasbourg Proposal. They seem to be deliberately ignoring His Holiness' subsequent appreciation of Chinese concerns and clarification of his Approach. Most recently, the Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan People that we had presented to the Chinese leadership in 2008 clearly outlined His Holiness's Middle Way Approach. It is in this context that the meeting between His Holiness and President Obama on February 18, 2010 has become significant. Following this meeting, the White House released the following statement⁹:

"The President met this morning at the White House with His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama. The President stated his strong support for the preservation of Tibet's unique religious, cultural and linguistic identity and the protection of human rights for Tibetans in the People's Republic of China. The President commended the Dalai Lama's "Middle Way" approach, his commitment to nonviolence and his pursuit of dialogue with the Chinese government. The President stressed that he has consistently encouraged both sides to engage in direct dialogue to resolve differences and was pleased to hear about the recent resumption of talks. The President and the Dalai Lama agreed on the importance of a positive and cooperative relationship between the United States and China."

President Obama's support of His Holiness' Middle Way Approach is a strong message to the Chinese leadership that no matter how they project it, the international community clearly understands the Approach to be pragmatic, reasonable and sincere.

We are in the process of studying the issues raised by our counterparts, including the proceedings of the Fifth Tibet Work Forum and the "Four Not to Indulge In" principles. Given political will on the Chinese leadership's side we do not see any reason why we cannot find a common ground on these issues.

Resolving the Tibetan issue concerns not merely the rights of the Tibetan people. Rather, it concerns the future of the Tibetan Buddhist culture, which impacts both the Tibetan people and the broader international community. Tibetan Buddhist culture, which is not

⁹ "Statement from the Press Secretary on the President's Meeting with His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama", The White House, February 18, 2010

necessarily Tibetan Buddhism, promotes a culture of compassion that is much needed in Tibet, in China and the region as a whole.

Specifically, China is aspiring to become a superpower but such a status cannot be achieved purely through military and economic strength. Rather, moral authority is a very important condition and this can be imparted by the Tibetan Buddhist culture.

From the geopolitical perspective, too, if the issue of Tibet is resolved, it will be a positive factor in the relationship between the two Asian giants, India and China. Environmentally, the Tibetan plateau is of great importance with scientists virtually naming it as the Third Pole. Tibet is also the source of many major Asian rivers. Thus, if the Tibetan environment is impacted, it affects the global environment.

The biggest concern of the Chinese leadership is the legitimacy of their rule in Tibet. The Chinese leadership knows that only one individual, the Dalai Lama, has the capability and authority to provide that. His Holiness the Dalai Lama is aware of the People's Republic of China's concerns and sensitivities with regard to the legitimacy of the present situation in Tibet. For this reason we have conveyed directly to the Chinese leadership, and His Holiness has also publicly stated, that he stands ready to lend his moral authority to endow an autonomy agreement, once reached, with the legitimacy it will need to gain the support of the Tibetan people and to be properly implemented.

We are convinced that this could be done without rewriting the history of Tibet. This is because if we go on the path of rewriting history of Tibet it will then not only lead to complicating further some of the existing conflicts in China's relationship with others, but even give birth to new ones. Furthermore, the Chinese leadership needs to ponder whether it should be making effort to lay claims on the basis of some past imperial actions and should understand the international ramification and repercussion if it does so.

I am grateful for this opportunity to share my thoughts at this prestigious institution to this gathering of experts and scholars. Fundamentally, the Tibetan issue needs to be resolved between the Tibetans and the Chinese. Just as the Chinese Government does not want a third party involvement, we Tibetans, too, feel the right way is to resolve it through talks with the Chinese leadership. At the same time the issue of Tibet is of international concern.

It is essential for students of the Tibetan-Chinese conflict to clearly understand and appreciate the differences between the fundamental positions of our two sides. Some experts do not seem to understand this. On our part, we will always be appreciative of any suggestions that are aimed at the mutual benefit of the Tibetan people and the Chinese. This is because we believe that we have a forward looking approach and also because of our willingness to be creative in the resolution of the Tibetan issue. His Holiness the Dalai Lama is committed to work with the Chinese Government so that the Tibetan people can maintain their distinctive identity, regain their pride and dignity and the People's Republic of China's stability and unity are ensured.