



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

China's response to Dalai Lama reincarnation statements shows Beijing's insecurity and lack of legitimacy

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Statement from the International Campaign for Tibet:

As the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism, His Holiness the Dalai Lama is given sole authority by the ancient traditions of his faith to select the manner of his reincarnation.

But when His Holiness made this clear in a recent interview, a spokesman for the foreign ministry of China's atheist, authoritarian government claimed that the Dalai Lama's reincarnation must comply with Chinese law, specifically the "Regulations on Religious Affairs" and "Measures on the Management of the Reincarnation of Living Buddhas."

Not only do the Chinese government's claims completely disregard centuries-old Tibetan Buddhist religious tradition; they also obviously violate the universal principle of religious freedom.

The regulations invoked by Beijing clearly do not meet international standards, as they openly deny the fundamental right of Tibetan Buddhist communities to follow their own spiritual process without government interference.

In addition, while these so-called regulations were recently passed by Chinese Communist Party-controlled institutions—the "Regulations on Religious Affairs" were published in 2004, while the "Measures on the Management of the Reincarnation of Living Buddhas" were published in 2007—the institution of the Dalai Lama is many centuries old. It was established in Tibet in the 14th century, and reincarnations of the Dalai Lama throughout history have been recognized following traditional Tibetan Buddhist practices, not Chinese Communist Party rules.

The Dalai Lama, who has both legal and moral authority over the issue, has categorically maintained that only he can make a decision on his reincarnation.

While the Chinese government seems intent on continuing its interference in Tibetan Buddhism, its plans to control the Dalai Lama's reincarnation will not only never be accepted by Tibetan Buddhists inside and outside Tibet; it will also be rejected by the international community as a blatant violation of religious freedom.

In fact, on March 8, 2019 the US Ambassador at Large for Religious Freedom Sam Brownback stated: "The international community must make clear now that we believe that members of the Tibetan communities, like members of all faith communities, should be able to select, educate, and venerate their religious leaders without government interference."

Below is the text of the exchange that took place during the Chinese Foreign Ministry Press Briefing on March 19, 2019.

“Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Geng Shuang's Regular Press Conference on March 19, 2019”

Q: The Dalai Lama said in an interview that it was possible that once he died, his incarnation could be found in India. And he warned that any other successor named by China would not be respected. What's China's comment?

A: I knew you would come up with this question, and let me give you an authoritative reply.

Reincarnation of living Buddhas, as a unique institution of inheritance in Tibetan Buddhism, comes with a set range of rituals and conventions. The Chinese government implements the policy of freedom of religious belief. The reincarnation system is respected and protected by such legal instruments as Regulations on Religious Affairs and Measures on the Management of the Reincarnation of Living Buddhas.

The institution of reincarnation of the Dalai Lama has been in existence for several hundred years. The 14th Dalai Lama himself was found and recognized following religious rituals and historical conventions and his succession was approved by the then central government. Therefore reincarnation of living Buddhas including the Dalai Lama must comply with Chinese laws and regulations and follow religious rituals and historical conventions."