

Testimony of Lodi G. Gyari, Special Envoy of H.H. the Dalai Lama

Date : March 13, 2007

House Foreign Affairs Committee Hearing on Status of Tibet Negotiations

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Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for inviting me to testify before your committee. Your decision to hold this hearing is a clear demonstration of how deeply members of this committee and the US Congress as a whole care about the issue of Tibet, helping His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan people overcome their present plight. As you know, I have had the honor of appearing before your predecessors, Chairman Hamilton, Gilman and Hyde. I want to thank you, Chairman Lantos, in particular, for your longstanding commitment to the Tibetan issue, and your close, personal friendship with His Holiness the Dalai Lama. I also want to express my deep appreciation to Rep. Ros-Lehtinen for her energetic and invaluable support.

I am also grateful to President Bush for his steadfast support of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's sincere efforts to find a mutually beneficial solution to the Tibet issue, and to Dr. Condoleezza Rice for her interest and support both while she was at the White House and now in her present position as Secretary of State. I am also grateful for their selection of Under Secretary Paula Dobriansky to serve as the Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues. This Administration has chosen someone who is experienced and skilled, and committed to moving this issue forward. I have been very fortunate to have worked with her closely over these past six years.

It is gratifying to know that other governments are also registering their support for Tibet. In the last two months alone, a comprehensive resolution on Tibet passed in the European Parliament, and motions on Tibet in Canada, Austria, Scotland, and initiatives in several other countries were launched. These signal interest around the world in seeing a mutually beneficial resolution of the Tibet issue.

The Chinese authorities criticize us for internationalizing the Tibet issue. But the fact of the matter is that Tibet became an international issue from the beginning precisely because of Chinese actions. The only remedy in front of us is to resolve the issue through dialogue.

At the outset, I want to again formally convey to the members of this committee the full commitment of His Holiness to a peaceful, negotiated settlement to the Tibet question within the framework of the People's Republic of China.

His Holiness firmly restated his position in his annual March 10th statement marking the anniversary of the Tibetan national uprising in 1959. Mr. Chairman, I seek your permission to enter His Holiness's March 10, 2007 statement into the record. Thank you.

Since the 1970's, His Holiness has taken the difficult but courageous position to find a mutually beneficial solution for the future of Tibet within the People's Republic of China. Therefore, His Holiness defines his Middle Path approach this way: Tibetans will not seek restoration of independence, and the Chinese government will respect the distinctive character of the Tibetan people, thereby making it possible for the Tibetan people to enjoy genuine regional autonomy.

Today, I would like to focus my remarks on the status of the dialogue with the People's Republic of China and the challenges and opportunities this process presents. As you know, in my capacity as

Special Envoy of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, I have been entrusted by him to serve as the lead interlocutor to engage the Chinese leadership on Tibet. Since 2002, my delegation has held five rounds of meetings with our Chinese counterparts. I cannot tell you that we have yet made a substantial break-through. Nevertheless, I want to inform you that we consider the five rounds of meetings an important move in the right direction.

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 in order for the present unfortunate situation to be resolved.

We also have a much clearer understanding of the Chinese government's position, their concerns, as well as a better idea of some of their misconceptions.

Mr. Chairman, our differences in viewpoints are numerous: some are indeed large and fundamental. The good news is that even my Chinese counterparts agree that it is a positive development that we each now have a clearer grasp of one another's divergent perspectives.

As a result, we have now reached the stage where if there is the political will on both sides, we have an opportunity to finally resolve this issue. Mr. Chairman, I can assure you that we have the political will to do so and that we will not give up. We have over and over again demonstrated this by our actions, in spite of difficulties, provocations, and the legitimate frustrations of our people.

At this time, I would like to share some of the fundamental issues we have discussed with our Chinese counterparts in our dialogue.

First, on the question of the historical relationship between Tibet and China, we believe that revisiting history will not serve any useful purpose, as we and the Chinese each have very different perspectives on past relations. Instead, His Holiness believes that what is important is the future, based on today's reality that Tibet is part of the People's Republic of China.

We have also witnessed time and again revisiting history does not work. This exercise will only pull us apart, not bring us together.

Second, since His Holiness has addressed China's fundamental concern that Tibet remains a part of the People's Republic of China. Therefore, the Chinese government should reciprocate by acknowledging the legitimate needs of the Tibetan people to have genuine regional autonomy. According to the Chinese Constitution, the law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy as well as the White Paper on Regional Ethnic Autonomy in Tibet, 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 religious belief; and freedom to administer, protect and be the first step to utilize their natural resources, and to independently develop their educational and cultural undertakings.

In treating the Tibetan people with respect and dignity through genuine autonomy, the Chinese leadership has the opportunity to create a truly multi-ethnic, harmonious nation without a tremendous cost in human suffering.

Third, His Holiness believes there should be a single administration for the Tibetan people inside China so that their unique way of life, tradition, and religion can be more effectively and peacefully maintained. Today, less than half of the Tibetan people reside in the Tibet Autonomous Region. The rest reside in Tibetan autonomous counties and prefectures in Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan provinces. All Tibetans residing in these areas share the same language, ethnicity, culture and tradition, and it would be impossible to achieve a negotiated solution for some and not others. Indeed, there is every reason, including the lesson of history, to believe that such an approach would cause tremendous instability on the Tibetan plateau.

Finally, there are two additional points that need to be addressed by the negotiations. The Chinese have the impression that His Holiness is asking for all Tibetan areas to be populated solely by Tibetans. Similarly, that his position is that Tibet must be free of the People's Liberation Army. We are fully aware that these are issues of concern to the Chinese government as these matters have been raised in our meetings. We have clarified these positions sufficiently to dispel their misconceptions. I am confident that through our discussions we will be able to further diminish these concerns.

For a more detailed discussion on these points, I request that the following statement on the negotiations which I delivered at the Brookings Institution last November be submitted for the record. Thank you.

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 build trust and find common ground. In furtherance of this goal, His Holiness has made the offer to go personally to China on a pilgrimage. He believes one of the strongest common bonds between the Tibetan and Chinese people is their shared Buddhist faith. There has been some initial reaction to this offer from certain Chinese officials that was favorable to this proposal. Unfortunately, these have been overshadowed by the recent harsh criticism of His Holiness from other quarters.

As you are probably aware, my Chinese counterparts have also been very active in briefing diplomatic missions as well as foreign offices and meeting with international leaders about their own position on these issues. Obviously, I differ with their characterizations. But, I welcome their decision to engage the international community on these issues.

As His Holiness announced in his March 10th statement, my colleague, Envoy Kelsang Gyaltzen, and I are ready to continue the dialogue anytime, anywhere. Since our last round, we have had several in-depth sessions with His Holiness and with Professor Samdhong Rinpoche, the democratically-elected head of the Kashag (cabinet). We possess the sincerity and commitment to pursue these talks to a result, and have genuinely considered the views of our counterparts. Likewise, it is my sincere hope that my counterparts have taken into full account of our fundamental positions and concerns.

Now is the time for a resolution to this issue. I hope the Chinese leadership seizes this opportunity. His Holiness is widely recognized and admired for his honesty and integrity. He has been pragmatic and flexible in wanting to negotiate with the leadership in Beijing 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 means of resolving the issue of Tibet.

Every Tibetan, including communist cadres as well as independence advocates, reveres His Holiness. It is a reality today that in spite of their tremendous suffering resulting from some of China's policies, the Tibetans have not resorted to violent means to respond to this injustice. This is largely because of the unwavering insistence on peace and reconciliation by His Holiness and the hope he provides to his people.

Some detractors in the Chinese Government believe that the aspirations of the Tibetan people will fade away once His Holiness passes. This is a dangerous and short-sighted approach. Certainly, the absence of His Holiness will be devastating to the Tibetan people. But just as importantly his absence will mean that the Chinese leadership will be left on their own to account for the problem. It is certain that the Tibetan issue will become more difficult to resolve with his absence, and that having had their beloved leader pass away in exile will create deep and irreparable wounds in the hearts of the Tibetan people. In the absence of His Holiness, there is no way that the entire population will 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 - it is actually something I fear - and it is also a statement of fact. His Holiness's world view, his special bond with the Tibetan people and the respect he enjoys in the international community all make the person of His Holiness key

both to achieving a negotiated solution to the Tibetan issue and to peacefully implementing any agreement that is reached. This is why I have consistently conveyed to my Chinese counterparts that far from being the problem, His Holiness is the solution.

President Hu's call for a "harmonious society" within China and "peaceful rise" internationally provides some indications of the positive approach and direction his generation of leaders may choose to take.

Mr. Chairman, we do not have a confirmed date for the next round, but I am in regular contact with my counterparts and we will have the sixth round of dialogue within a month or two. While these negotiations have been difficult, and at times painful, I must say, however, that my Chinese counterparts have conducted themselves in an exemplary manner.

In closing, I want to thank you and the US Congress for continuing to encourage the Chinese leadership to engage meaningfully in the dialogue process as it the only avenue to a peaceful and mutually satisfactory resolution of the Tibetan issue.

As Special Envoy, I also have the responsibility to thank you on behalf of His Holiness the Dalai Lama for the concrete and tangible assistance you have provided to Tibetan people in exile and in Tibet. While small in size, these programs have had a huge impact on the lives of many ordinary Tibetans and are a life-line to countless others.

As a Tibetan, I am also deeply touched by this Congress bestowing the Congressional Gold Medal, its highest honor, on His Holiness the Dalai Lama. It is a tremendous expression of support for him, and recognition of his leadership on behalf of peace and nonviolence. This high honor is being given, at a particularly appropriate time, when the world is being shattered by ethnic and sectarian conflict.