

Testimony of Lodi Gyaltzen Gyari on US Tibet policy

Date : March 7, 2002

Addressing the House International Relations Committee on Tibet on March 7, 2002, Gyari stressed the China's leaders need to engage the Dalai Lama in the interest of both the Tibetan and Chinese people. He also urged the United States Congress to continue strengthen its support to the Dalai Lama in his efforts to resolve the issue of Tibet through dialogue with the Chinese leadership.

[ICT Chairman Richard Gere](#) and [Undersecretary of State Paula Dobriansky](#), who is the U.S. Special Coordinator for Tibet, also testified in today's hearing before the House International Relations Committee.

In addition to addressing human rights concerns, Tibetan refugees and religious freedom issues, they stressed the importance of dialogue between Chinese leaders and the Dalai Lama or his representatives as an essential step towards resolving the Tibet issue in the best interest of both the Tibetan and Chinese people.

Congressman Henry Hyde (R-IL), who is Chairman of the House International Relations Committee and who chaired the hearing, said that such efforts would "contribute to a just and lasting solution" to the Tibet issue.

The full text of Lodi Gyari's testimony follows below:

Testimony of Lodi Gyaltzen Gyari, Special Envoy of His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Hearing on U.S. Policy Considerations in Tibet
House Committee on International Relations
March 7, 2002

Chairman Hyde, it is an honor to testify before this esteemed Committee. Thank you for your interest. Indeed, the long sustained interest of the International Relations Committee in the issue of Tibet has been a significant asset to the efforts of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan leadership as we continue to seek a negotiated solution with Beijing.

I have just returned from a visit to India to consult with the Tibetan leadership and His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who has asked me to convey his greetings and gratitude to you, Mr. Chairman, and the members of this Committee. As was widely reported in the media, His Holiness was recently indisposed, but now I am pleased to inform you that he is has completely recovered and is beginning to attend to his normal routine.

Members of Congress acting in Committee and individually have taken significant initiative to reach out to the Chinese leadership to urge dialogue with His Holiness, respect for religious freedom, and on behalf of certain Tibetan political prisoners. I know that some congressional friends have been deeply frustrated in their efforts and have even questioned the utility of continuously raising Tibet with the Chinese when their words appear to fall on deaf ears. Yet, I must ask you today not to give up.

For the people of Tibet, congressional resolve has given us hope that the possibility of a political solution has not been foreclosed. As long as people have hope, they refrain from desperate measures. Although Tibetans inside Tibet must live in a political and economic situation increasingly beyond their control and by every measure less and less Tibetan, they still cling to hope -- hope that His Holiness the Dalai Lama will one day return and hope that they will be delivered from Chinese oppression.

As His Holiness has given me the responsibility of assisting him to reach out to the Chinese leadership, I can assure you that we are working very hard and sincerely to start a dialogue leading to negotiations. His Holiness the Dalai Lama's Middle Way approach provides a meeting point between Tibetan and Chinese interests. In brief, this approach says that despite the historical right of Tibetans to be independent, His Holiness is willing to begin talks on genuine autonomy for the Tibetan people within the People's Republic of China.

When His Holiness met President George W. Bush last May, he sought the administration's support in encouraging the Chinese government to respond positively to his efforts at dialogue. He also explicitly asked the President to convey to the Chinese government that he is only seeking genuine autonomy for the Tibetan people, and not independence. President Bush strongly spoke about Tibet during his visit to Shanghai last year. Again, during his recent visit to Beijing, President Bush urged negotiations with the Dalai Lama. On both these trips the President conveyed the serious concern for Tibet by including in his delegation Undersecretary Dobriansky, the US Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues.

I would also like to use this occasion to express publicly my appreciation to Secretary of State Colin Powell for his selection of Undersecretary Dobriansky to be the Tibet Coordinator. I have worked with Undersecretary Dobriansky for some eight months and on three continents. She is committed to making progress on the issue of dialogue and has assiduously labored on that front. His Holiness and leaders of the Tibetan exile government are especially pleased to know that someone who intuitively understands devotion to homeland and sees the possibility for change in Tibet is now the U.S. representative to the Chinese leadership on Tibetan issues.

In spite of these efforts and to our disappointment, the Chinese government has not only failed to respond positively but they continues to create the impression that His Holiness the Dalai Lama continues to engage in "splittist" activities and, for reasons which are beyond my comprehension, they continue to misrepresent and distort His Holiness' actions.

In October last year His Holiness was invited to address the full plenary session of the European Parliament. It was my privilege to accompany him to Strasbourg, France. At the European Parliament, His Holiness restated his position that he is seeking genuine autonomy, not independence, for Tibet. I ask that the full text of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's October 24, 2001 address to the European Parliament be included in the official record of this hearing. His Holiness said, in part:

"I have led the Tibetan freedom struggle on a path on non-violence and have consistently sought a mutually agreeable solution to the Tibetan issue through negotiations in the spirit of reconciliation and compromise with China??my proposal envisages that Tibet enjoy genuine autonomy within the framework of the People's Republic of China. However, not the autonomy on paper imposed on us 50 years ago in the 17-Point Agreement, but a true self-governing, genuinely autonomous Tibet, with Tibetans fully responsible for their own domestic affairs, including the education of their children, religious matters, cultural affairs, the care of their delicate and precious environment, and the local economy. Beijing would continue to be responsible for the conduct of foreign and defense affairs. This solution would greatly enhance the international image of China and contribute to her stability and unity - the two topmost priorities of Beijing - while at the same time the Tibetans would be ensured of the basic rights and freedoms to preserve their own civilization and to protect the delicate environment of the Tibetan Plateau."

In three days, His Holiness will deliver his annual address to the Tibetan people on the 43rd anniversary of the 1959 uprising and his flight into exile. His Holiness will once again repeat his commitment to non-violence and dialogue.

Although on the issue of negotiations, we have seen no substantive movement, we have not given up hope. In fact we are going to be much more vigorous in our effort while China's policies toward

the Tibetan people continue to be repressive.

It is encouraging to see the overall trend in China, which I must say is one that is moving in the right direction even though at much slower pace than we all hope for. I was reflecting yesterday on the March 5 address by Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji to the National People's Congress. Compared to the rhetoric that one heard from Chinese leaders 15 to 20 years back, the difference is, to use a term the Chinese themselves are fond of using, "earth shattering." In particular, I was encouraged to read Premier Zhu reflecting the mood and anger of the Chinese workers and farmers. Advising the Chinese officials, Premier Zhu said, "We should initiate investigations and studies, go all the way down to the realities of life and to the people to learn their actual conditions, listen to their opinions, share their weal and woe, and lose no time in solving the problems they resent or are dissatisfied about."

This is precisely what the Chinese leadership needs to do on Tibet. The problem is not the relationship between His Holiness and the Chinese and definitely not about the return of the Dalai Lama or his position. If the Chinese authorities reflected on the Tibetan problem in the way Premier Zhu was advising, it should be them who should be seeking the good offices of the Dalai Lama to find a solution.

Mr. Chairman, my intention is not to spend my time and energy knocking on the doors of the international community and institutions such as this august body but to engage directly the Chinese in serious and meaningful dialogue to resolve the issue. But until we get a positive response from the Chinese side and our talks begin, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and those who work for him have an obligation to the Tibetan people to make every effort possible to continue to talk about the plight of the Tibetan people, both publicly and privately, and to urge the Chinese government to respond to our sincere effort.

The United States Congress has been a beacon of hope to the Tibetan people's nonviolent, legitimate struggle for the preservation and promotion of their unique heritage and national identity. Congressional action on Tibet has gone beyond expressions of support to include important concrete help through various assistance programs.

These programs go beyond taking care of the immediate needs of refugees who have had to flee our homeland to include projects that help preserve Tibet's distinct identity and cultural, religious and linguistic heritage.

Ironically, the essence of the Tibetan culture, if not its full flowering, is currently best preserved outside of Tibet because His Holiness the Dalai Lama has reestablished many of our traditional institutions in exile to this purpose. Today, while preserving our traditional Tibetan way of life, Tibetans in exile live in a vibrant modern and democratic civil society, with the highest of our government's leaders directly elected by the people and a vibrant civil society. The generous assistance provided by the people of the United States is making it possible for an ancient but living Tibetan civilization to sustain itself.

One of the major concerns of our struggle is the empowerment of the Tibetan people. We are gratified that the United States is contributing in the preparation of our young people to serve our community through educational opportunities in many of your best institutions.

Tibetans in exile also receive support and assistance for the promotion of human rights and democracy training through small program grants of the National Endowment for Democracy. These targeted grants have been of great value to our fledgling NGOs, our free press, and have enriched the community at large, an arrangement that has been tremendously gratifying for all parties involved.

Of greatest concern to His Holiness the Dalai Lama are Tibetans inside Tibet. Under the present

circumstances, there is very little that His Holiness can directly contribute towards their socio-economic well-being. However, we greatly appreciate and strongly encourage congressional support for some programs inside Tibet.

It is very important to monitor the programs so that they directly benefit the Tibetan people and to make certain that the programs are implemented in the most sensible and sensitive manner, so as not to put at risk the people on the ground. Since the intention of these programs is to help stave off the process of marginalization and to empower Tibetans, it is essential that the programs be inspired, and to the greatest extent possible, implemented by Tibetans and not imposed solely at the discretion of "experts."

It is ironic that the present Chinese attitude has, in fact, become a major hindrance to the infusion of tremendous international interest in participating in the reconstruction and development of Tibet. The contact, goodwill and the warm relations that His Holiness and the Tibetan people have established in the last 50 years could serve as a tremendous resource for Tibet. It would have been a positive and meaningful development had the much-publicized "Western Development " program -- as far as it affected Tibetan areas -- was formulated in consultation with His Holiness. It is never too late. Instead the "Western Development" program is becoming yet another source of resentment for the Tibetans in Tibet against the Chinese leadership because they do not see any direct benefit.

Other congressional initiatives that have long-term positive influence on the Tibetan people are the Tibetan language programs of the Voice of America and Radio Free Asia. Today, Tibetans inside Tibet are informed about international initiatives on Tibet on a daily basis through these broadcasts. While we are pleased with the overall performance of these programs, it is important for the Congress from time to time to review their performances to see that the goals and the intent of the Congress are maintained.

Comprehensive legislation that incorporates all of these initiatives is the Tibetan Policy Act, which is presently before the Congress. It was introduced in the House by Congressmen Lantos and Kirk and has, I believe, 98 cosponsors. Senator Dianne Feinstein, who regards His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Senior Chinese leaders as her friends, spoke these words on the Senate floor when introducing the Senate bill:

"I want to be a positive force for bringing Tibetan and Chinese leaders to the table for face-to-face dialogue. It is not my intention with this legislation to merely point fingers and lay blame??my intent in introducing the Tibetan Policy Act is to place the full faith of the United States Government behind efforts to preserve the distinct cultural, religious and ethnic autonomy of the Tibetan people??I am convinced that we must send a clear message."

Mr. Chairman, you can be sure that the Tibetan Policy Act and other messages sent by this body on behalf of the political and human rights challenges facing Tibetans are heard and carefully noted in Beijing. As China enters into a period of political transition, unsettled issues, such as Tibet, could be reconsidered and international implications for policy adjustments would be weighed.

We are deeply concerned about the human rights situation in Tibet. The Tibet section of the Human Rights report released by the State Department this week indicates the seriousness lack of freedom in Tibet. I hope that future reports on Tibet by the State Department will be comprehensive, cover all Tibetan areas, and reflect the spirit and intent of the legislation that directed the State Department to report on human rights abuses in Tibet.

Hundreds of political prisoners languish in jails. I said when Ngawang Choephel was released that, if this is a genuine effort on China's part to make a gesture to the Tibetan people and not an appeasement to President Bush on the eve of his Beijing visit, then it needs to be followed by the release of additional political prisoners. Tanak Jigme Sangpo, a 74-year old teacher who spent the best part of his life in prison, as well as the nuns in Drapchi prison -- Ngawang Sandrol, Gyaltzen

Drolkar, Ngawang Choezom, Jigme Yangchen, Ngawang Choekyi, Phuntsog Nyidron, Lhundrub Zangmo, Tenzin Thubten, Rigzin Choekyi, Ngawang Tsamdrol and Namdrol Lhamo -- should all be released.

I would like to thank the Congress for its advocacy on behalf of Ngawang Choephel and other prisoners, and Congressman Lantos for his personal efforts on behalf of Tanak Jigme Sangpo.

Of course, our major concern continues to be the case of the young Panchen Lama. Even today we have no information on his whereabouts. The Panchen Lama is still missing 7 years after he was taken into custody by the Chinese authorities at the age of 6. His continued detention is not merely an egregious affront to religious freedom; it is a cruelty against a child.

Concerning Chadrel Rinpoche, there are conflicting reports. His sentence is complete but the Chinese government has not made any formal announcement about his release. We wait with hope for some positive movement from the Chinese side. In the next six months, if some prominent Tibetan political prisoners are released, then we will acknowledge that there is a positive trend.

This year and the next are years of opportunity and challenge for Tibet. As we all know, a new leadership will be ushered in. However, unlike some other observers, I do not expect any major fundamental shift. Jiang Zemin will continue to exert a strong influence and if the succession process goes smoothly the present Vice President, Hu Jintao, will be the leader of the fourth generation that will take charge. I do not intend to present here an analytical study of the Chinese leadership. However, the fact that Hu spent some time in Tibet and is well versed with the situation there could be a positive factor and an opportunity for Tibet. However, I believe that we need to look at Hu Jintao in his unique situation, instead of trying to see if he will be a "Gorbachov" or a "Putin." China will continue to be governed by a collective leadership with Hu at the core.

Again, Mr. Chairman and Congressman Lantos, thank you for convening this hearing. I look forward to working with you, Chairman Leach, and all members of this Committee in the interest of Tibet.