

**Press Statement Dr. Wolfgang Gerhardt
Chairman, Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung für die Freiheit
Brussels, 11th May 2007**

The Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung für die Freiheit regrets the decision of His Holiness the Dalai Lama not to attend the 5th International Tibet Support Groups Conference. Conferences of this kind are organized every three or four years. Their objectives are to coordinate the work of the International Tibet Groups and to strengthen the ties between them and the Central Tibetan Administration-in-Exile.

The Belgian Government was informed about the conference and the attendance of His Holiness the Dalai Lama a long time ago. Until very recently, the Government had not expressed the position that a visit of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to Brussels would be inappropriate or undesirable.

We fail to understand why the Belgian Ambassador to the United States of America approached His Holiness the Dalai Lama personally on 1st May and communicated to him in diplomatic terms that his visit to Brussels and his participation in the conference would be undesirable because of an upcoming visit of the Belgian Crown Prince and a business delegation to China.

I am especially surprised about the fact that, through its position, the Belgian Government also prevented His Holiness the Dalai Lama from accepting an appointment with the President of the European Parliament, Prof. Dr. Hans-Gert Pöttering. This meeting had been scheduled for this morning. It is tempting to consider for a moment that the Government of the United States of America would act along those lines and prevent high-ranking leaders from visits to the United Nations. I do not see any acceptable or tolerable explanation for such a behavior. This is especially true for a country which hosts the institutions of the European Union.

The topic of human and civil rights has always been of highest priority for the Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung für die Freiheit. Therefore, we have supported the Tibetans-in-Exile for many years in their quest to protect their identity, their language and their culture, and in their right to eventually return to their homeland. The *One-China-Doctrine* has never been put into question by the Foundation. His Holiness the Dalai Lama is a world-wide symbol of peaceful dialogue. This is why we have supported the just cause of the Tibetans-in-Exile in India as well as the International Support Groups Conferences in Prague, Berlin and Bonn.