

Es gilt das gesprochene Wort!

**Inaugural Speech**  
**by Dr. Wolfgang Gerhardt**  
**Chairman, Friedrich Naumann Stiftung für die Freiheit**  
**Fifth International Conference of Tibet Support Groups**  
**Brussels, 11<sup>th</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> May 2007**

Dear Kalon Tripa Professor Rinpoche,  
Madame Anne-Marie Lizin,  
Minister Vijai Singh Mankotia from India,  
Respected Mr. Walter Muls,  
Mr. Marc Liegeois,

Ladies and Gentlemen in the Plenary,

As the Chairman of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, I welcome all of you very cordially to the Fifth International Conference of Tibet Support Groups. We are happy to co-host here all of you in the city of Brussels, the "Capital of Europe".

I consider it a privilege of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, the "Stiftung für die Freiheit", to support this significant event for the fourth consecutive time as an active part of the international support movement for the cause of Tibet.

We are grateful for the support and assistance that we enjoy here in Brussels from our co-host, the Belgian Inter-Parliamentary Group for Tibet. I would like to thank in particular Mr. Walter Muls, the Chairman of the Group. Mr. Muls readily rendered his assistance and help to the organizers whenever requested.

We also are privileged to have Madame Anne-Marie Lizin with us here today, the Former President of the Belgian Senate and Mayor of the City Huy.

**Kirstin Balke**  
Pressesprecherin

Truman-Haus  
Karl-Marx-Str. 2  
14482 Potsdam

Fon: + 49(0)331.70 19-277  
Fax: + 49(0)331.70 19-286  
kirstin.balke@fnst-freiheit.org  
www.fnst-freiheit.org

Monsieur Marc Liegeois, the President of the principle Tibet Support Group here in Belgium, Les Amis du Tibet, has kindly accepted our request to lead us through this Inaugural Session as Master of Ceremony. I am grateful for this, and I extend my special greetings to the Belgian Tibet Support Movement!

It gives me immense pleasure to welcome Professor Samdong Rinpoche, the Kalon Tripa of the Central Tibetan Administration. Your Excellency, you are the embodiment of the democratic institutions of the Tibetan Community-in-Exile and the symbol of the democratic development that the Tibetan people have chosen for themselves. It is an honor and a pleasure to have you with us for this conference.

Ladies and Gentlemen, from the very onset it was quite a task to organize this conference. Way back in March 2005, His Holiness received the Executive Chairman of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, Mr. Rolf Berndt, and the Chairman of our Board of Trustees, Dr. Jürgen Morlock, for an audience in Dharamsala. At this occasion two suitable locations for having this conference were discussed: Brussels and Mexico City.

It was first checked whether the Fifth Tibet Support Group Conference could be arranged in Mexico, in order to focus, for the first time, on the support for Tibet from the Latin American region. However, it soon turned out that presently too many obstacles lay in the way for having a suitable conference there. Taking the Tibet Support Groups Conference to Latin America, therefore, remains a task for the future.

Hence, our attention immediately turned to Brussels as the right venue for this conference. After all, Brussels is – if you permit this description – the "Capital of Europe"! It is, if not the heart, at least the brains and nerve center of European politics. What better place could there be for advocacy and lobbying for the Tibetan cause?

A very important segment of the International Support Movement for Tibet is located in Europe. At this crucial stage in the development of the Tibetan issue, it is the right signal for the free and democratic Europe to show its support and solidarity for a People that desires nothing else but justice, human rights, and autonomy over its cultural, religious and social affairs. Nothing else – but also nothing less! A People which has decided to fight for its future in freedom and self-responsibility by peaceful means – and *only* by peaceful means! A People that deserves the support and solidarity of a free Europe! If we Europeans take our values, norms and political culture seriously, there is no better way than sending out our messages from our political center.

Unfortunately, His Holiness the Dalai Lama is not among us today. For the first time, the important event of a Tibet Support Groups Conference will have to be conducted without the

presence, the guidance and the spiritual leadership of His Holiness. This is a matter of great pity and also of great concern for all of us.

In whichever country His Holiness the Dalai Lama sets foot, governments come under pressure from the leadership and the authorities of the People's Republic of China. It was not different this time. Right from the beginning, the Belgian Government had been informed about this conference – about its objectives, its participants and also, of course, about the fact that His Holiness would be attending.

Much to my surprise, the Belgian Government showed increasing nervousness and reluctance to his visit to Brussels with each day we came closer to having this conference. Last week, it took the unusual step to address His Holiness personally, and it requested him to reconsider his attendance which would put unnecessary strains on the Belgian-Chinese relations. His Holiness is a man of principles, and one of his principles is *not* to visit places where he feels unwelcome. Thus, much to his – and our – regret, he found himself in a situation in which he had to decide not to participate in this conference.

I do not want to conceal from you that I find this a very deplorable development. As much as I understand the sensitivities of His Holiness, I can only strongly regret the position of the Government of Belgium. The considerations of the Belgium Government run counter to the values and norms that a free Europe should stand for. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first time that an eminent leader who stands for freedom, democracy and peace is, for all practical purposes, prevented from attending a public meeting in the “Capital of Europe”. These considerations are definitely not in line with the attitudes of the Belgian people who, I am sure, would have considered it an honor to welcome His Holiness on Belgian soil.

I have said it earlier today in a press conference – and Count Lambsdorff, my predecessor as Chairman of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation has joined me here –, and I repeat it now: There are no good and valid reasons for any government of the free, democratic world to bow down to pressures.

We do not bow to political pressure and we will not accept a policy of silencing the voice of the international civil society. In a situation like this, it is evident where we stand: at the side of those who strive for freedom, human rights and justice. This is exactly what the struggle of His Holiness the Dalai Lama is about; this is the focus of the work of the Central Tibetan Administration; this is what brings all of you gathered here today to Brussels; and this is what this conference is about: Freedom, Human Rights and Justice. We from Friedrich Naumann Foundation are proud to be with you here today.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as unfortunate as the absence of His Holiness is, it at the same time also indicates the importance of this Conference. Our main objective is to develop the framework for a worldwide strategy and for international campaigns to protect the Tibetan culture from being destroyed, to help reinstating the basic human rights for the Tibetan people, and to develop options of how to realize autonomy for Tibet. Therefore, this event still is a unique platform – it presents the basis for enhanced communication between the Tibetan leadership in Dharamsala and the international support movement; it contributes to the formulation of policies of the Central Tibetan Administration.

The International Tibet Support Movement today is stronger than ten or fifteen years ago. We have had successful meetings in Bonn 1996, in Berlin 2000 and in Prague 2003. We have developed a common basis for our struggle, we have worked out strategies and action plans which gave meaning and contents to our struggle. We will continue with these efforts at this occasion, and I would like to state at this stage already my conviction that all participants will again work professionally for the achievements of our common goals.

The ground situation in Tibet continues to be grim, as you all know. The US State Department's Annual Human Rights Report for 2006 notes that in Tibet tight control structures on religious and other fundamental freedoms remain serious problems. The report describes in detail widespread abuses of human rights, including instances of arbitrary arrest, detention, torture in prison, actions against Tibetan monasteries and religious institutions, and other violations of human and civil rights.

In the recent past, the dialogue between the representatives of His Holiness and the People's Republic of China has not progressed. Quite the contrary, the Chinese government has increased its negative rhetoric against His Holiness the Dalai Lama. In August 2006, the newly appointed Communist Party Secretary in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), Zhang Qingli, sharply criticized the Dalai Lama, and dismissed his "Middle Way Approach" as "splittism." There are many more comments like these by Chinese officials. Unfortunately, statements like this one cast doubts on the willingness to establish a serious, mutually agreeable solution of the problem. They overshadow the process of dialogue and negotiations. To denounce His Holiness the Dalai Lama as a "Splittist" is not only harmful rhetoric, it is also utterly wrong: He is indeed a "Unifyer", whose interest is to unify people on the basis of peace, harmony, self-responsibility and justice.

How can we help progress with the dialogue? Why have we not been able to convince our own governments back home for a positive shift in their policies concerning Tibet? Can we allow that human rights are obviously considered to be less important than economic issues and

trade relations? I am sure that questions like these run in all our minds, not only during this conference, but all the time.

Next year, in 2008, we will witness the Olympic Games being held in China. The youth of this world will assemble for the first time in this great country in order to compete and perform in the most outstanding ways that humans are able to. The Olympics stand for peaceful competition, for peaceful interaction between civilized peoples, for laying down arms and weapons. Will there be any positive effect for the Tibetan people, for their quest for peace and freedom? What can we do to attract world opinion to the injustice that is being done in Tibet, to the absence of peace in that region?

Some signs offer hope. Inside China the quest for freedom – not only for economic freedom, but for political freedom as well – is taking more ground. As a direct consequence of the unprecedented technological advances in the age of globalization, the Chinese authorities find it increasingly difficult to block vital information on concepts such as freedom, democracy, civil liberties from its citizens. It is my deep conviction that no society in the long run will support a regime which suppresses the fundamental rights of its citizens. The peoples of China are and will not be an exception.

In my view, we should try to send out our message across to the many open-minded Chinese, who are willing to understand the truth about Tibet – to Chinese students and academicians, to Chinese businessmen, also to Chinese politicians – in one word, to the *Chinese citizens*. To me, this becomes imperative at this stage of the movement. In this respect, we must use the complete resources that technology has to offer. Our time is *NOW*, especially so because of the Olympic Games coming up next year. However, we also need to sustain our campaigns and focus on China and Tibet also after the Olympics. How this can be achieved is something I hope this conference will deliberate upon as well.

Ladies and gentlemen, stretching out to the Chinese citizens also serves another purpose, namely to draw China closer to the mainstream of the world community, to have this great country finally integrate itself in the free world. I am convinced that autonomy, freedom and justice for Tibet are inextricably linked with the general development that the government and the society of China take on a wider scale.

China has already taken an important step in this direction, by signing the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. As Otto Graf Lambsdorff pointed out in Prague in 2000 already, it is now important that this Covenant be also ratified by China, and that its standards and mechanisms are being adhered to in Chinese political life. For the benefit not only of the Chinese, but of the international community at large, it is necessary that China

becomes a responsible stakeholder in the international community. Its expansion of economic freedom must be matched by a growth of political freedom. One freedom without the other is a sheer contradiction in terms, which can only be sustained artificially and by force, and which is short-lived, as many examples in history show.

Surely the Chinese leaders realize that they cannot let their population experience increasing economic freedoms while cutting them off from their rights to speak, to write and to worship. A policy towards Tibet that is based on freedom and justice would undoubtedly enhance and also complement the respect China has earned from its economic growth. Political, social and religious freedom is as important as economic freedom, and all these add to the greatness of a nation.

Therefore, it is in China's self-interest to resolve Tibet issue. His Holiness the Dalai Lama's Middle Way Approach calls for genuine autonomy for Tibet, as the best option at present for a peaceful, just and prospective solution for all parties involved. This is a moderate policy which is compatible with the constitutional framework of the People's Republic of China and does not call for new international borders.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am delighted to meet so many dedicated Tibet supporters from around the world at this conference. The Tibet cause needs the unequivocal support of the international community of which the TSGs form such a strong and a vibrant part. Such overwhelming support re-emphasizes my own belief, as well as that of the Foundation, in the necessity to further strengthen and support the Tibet cause. The Tibet movement touches core concerns of Liberals, namely the respect for universal human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law.

At this occasion, allow me to salute the US Government's Special Coordinator for Tibet, Mrs. Paula Dobrenski. I would like to congratulate the US Government for creating this important position whose goals are two-fold: firstly, to promote a substantive dialogue between the Chinese government and the Dalai Lama or his representatives, and secondly, to help sustain Tibet's unique religious, linguistic, and cultural heritage. The US has taken a very keen and an active role on the Tibet issue. However, it should not remain the only government that is constantly visible in its support for Tibet on the international level.

Europe must also take more proactive steps. This is in our long-term interests, even if it means short-term inconveniences. Tibet support groups have been requesting for an EU representative based on the US model, however this request – which dates back to 1998 – has not materialized till now. Should the Tibetan leaders feel this request needs following up, I

offer the services of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, the “Stiftung fuer die Freiheit”, if you consider these helpful for the realization of this goal.

Ultimately, quite naturally, the Tibetans have to make their own choices to determine their own future. As supporters of the Tibet cause, our role, therefore, is to *contribute* to the formulation of policies decided upon by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the democratically elected Leadership of the Central Tibetan Administration in Dharamsala. During this conference, let us concentrate on producing an effective plan of action which will help His Holiness and the Tibetan Leadership in their quest.

Lastly, as most of you know, Dr. Otto Graf Lambsdorff has taken retirement last year, after many years of distinguished service as Chairman of the Foundation. Tibet was and will, I am sure, continue to remain one of his main passions. I thank him for his steadfast support to this deserving cause. In my capacity as his successor as Chairman of the Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, I will continue to offer my personal support and that of the “Stiftung fuer die Freiheit” to His Holiness the Dalai Lama and to the Tibetan leadership.

I am pleased you have accepted the invitation to attend the Fifth International Conference of Tibet Support Groups which I am sure will further strengthen the movement and will be an important step to materialize the vision of an autonomous Tibet with people living in freedom, justice and peace. I wish this conference, and I wish all participants, hard work and a successful outcome.

Thank you.