

We are not asking for 'high' or 'low' degree of autonomy: Kalon Tripa

Saturday, 12 May 2007, 10:14 a.m.

Following is the full text of the statement of Kalon Tripa Prof. Samdhong Rinpoche, at the inauguration of 5th International Tibet Support Group Conference in Brussels, Belgium, 11-14 May 2007

On behalf of the Tibetans in exile, I would like to thank all of you gathered here for this expression of your support for the just cause of the Tibetan people. The Tibet movement draws its strength and vitality largely from your solidarity and active involvement. Your support for the just cause of the Tibetan people has been consistent and unwavering. This comes as a source of great inspiration for the Tibetan people in Tibet and for those of us in exile who serve as free spokespersons for our brothers and sisters back home.

We all know that Tibet supporters worldwide are genuine supporters for universal human values and justice. Each supporter has volunteered in response to the call of his or her own inner voice without any selfish motive such as economic and political advantage. This motivation comes neither from one's own national interest in the international geopolitical scenario nor even from the Central Tibetan Administration or by the Tibetan community. Therefore, each one of you is a person of moral conscience and an independent thinker. His Holiness always says that Tibet supporters are neither anti-China nor pro-Tibetan but pro-justice. Indeed, none of us engage in anything which is harmful or contrary to the interests of the Chinese people.

Here, I reiterate my earlier statement that Central Tibetan Administration has no intention to motivate, inspire, direct or even request you to do any specific thing in accordance with our plan or strategies. The Department of Information and International Relations of CTA, acting as a co-convenor of this conference, is simply there to facilitate you to have this platform to exchange ideas, share your experiences with each other and to enhance networking and co-operation among yourselves.

I am very much aware that there are many Tibet support groups and individuals who do not agree with our policies and our way of functioning. Despite the differences and disagreements in our opinions, we very much value your support since you are seeking justice for the people of Tibet. But I would like to emphasise that our respect for your work must not be interpreted as evidence that we are not sincere in our Middle-Way Approach or that we are instigating you to uphold the position of Tibetan independence or separation of Tibet from the People's Republic of China. I am saying this because the officials of PRC always blame us that His Holiness the Dalai Lama must be having a hidden agenda for he does not stop the activities of Tibetans and Tibet supporters who are seeking Tibetan independence. Of course, such allegation is totally baseless. This allegation comes out of a mindset which is unexposed, and ignorant of a free and democratic society. We hope they will understand us more when PRC itself becomes more democratic and free society.

You all know very well what happened to Tibet since 1951 and what is the present situation of Tibet. Therefore, I am not wasting your time by dwelling on the history and about happenings in Tibet. I will only touch briefly on some of the important points of our policy and salient features of our movement.

We are aware that we are working in a very peculiar environment in the world. The principle of "might is right" is operating in an unprecedented scale. To remain with truth and justice becomes extremely difficult. The majority of humanity believes that economic and political might is the only human value and everything else can be compromised to achieve it. Freedom, equality, human rights

and democracy are very much talked about, but in reality no nation in the world today has neither such freedom nor do they care for the human rights and democracy. A bullying power can prevent a sovereign country in welcoming His Holiness the Dalai Lama is a clear evidence of the situation of the world today. Despite that we still believe that the truth will prevail sooner or later.

Throughout the years of the ongoing tragedy in Tibet, the Tibetan people have shown unfailing forbearance and have yet retained their faith in the justness of their struggle and in the integrity of their precious cultural heritage. Despite needless provocation and constant intrusion into their lives by the authorities in Tibet, the fact that the Tibetan people in Tibet has remained calm is because of the untiring counsel of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the deep influence of Tibet's cultural and spiritual heritage.

For this reason His Holiness the Dalai Lama has framed the Tibetan struggle not in political but in cultural terms. The Tibetan people through the centuries have incorporated into their culture and lifestyle the wisdom of Buddhist India. And this wisdom teaches us how to lead happy and productive lives. And happiness is of concern to every single human being.

In order that the culture of Tibet be put more effectively in the service of humanity in terms of increasing happiness and personal wellbeing, His Holiness the Dalai Lama long ago felt that in our increasingly interdependent world, political independence was not that important as long as the Tibetan people are given sufficient freedoms to decide all their domestic issues, including the freedom to preserve and promote the best in their culture and spiritual heritage.

Therefore His Holiness the Dalai Lama has come out with the extremely moderate Middle-Way Approach which eschews independence for Tibet in return for the six million Tibetans enjoying meaningful autonomy. When such an arrangement, with the active cooperation of the PRC leadership, is realised, it will allow the Tibetan people the freedom to continue to develop their culture, whose value and message transcends political boundaries and ethnic divisions. I believe this culture, in a world of unprecedented changes, will give hope and succour to millions of people around the world, including the Chinese, as they confront new opportunities and challenges.

As such I believe that the international support for the Middle-Way Approach of His Holiness the Dalai Lama is not simply an expression of support for the cause of the Tibetan people alone. It is also an expression of support for a process of conflict resolution that is based on non-violence, dialogue, the courage to compromise, respect for the environment and the other party's genuine concerns. I believe these principles need to be at the core of any peace process or any freedom struggle, if humanity is to survive and live sustainably here on planet Earth.

As far as our contacts with the Chinese leadership is concerned, His Holiness the Dalai Lama has directed us to leave no stone unturned to deepen these contacts. On our part, we are ready to continue the dialogue anytime, anywhere. Meanwhile, we have made the core desire of the Tibetan side absolutely clear to the PRC leaders. We have reiterated these in the Kashag's 10th March Statement of 2007. Our two desires are that the constitutional provisions of national regional autonomy must be implemented sincerely both in letter and spirit and secondly as per the common aspiration of the people of Tibet, all Tibetans must be administered by a single autonomous self-government. The PRC leadership can very easily grant whatever we are asking for, if they have the political will. They need not have to amend their constitution nor make a major shift in their policies.

We are not asking for 'high' or 'low' degree of autonomy. We are simply asking for the sincere implementation of the national regional autonomy provisions enshrined in the constitution of the People's Republic of China, which is further spelt out in the autonomy law. Similarly, it is a fact that Tibetans are just one minority nationality amongst the 55 minority nationalities of the PRC. We are a

single unit, made so by a common language, culture, nationality and a way of life and the fact that we lived together on the Tibetan plateau since time immemorial. We are neither asking for 'greater' or 'smaller' Tibet. Everyone must not be misled by the PRC's propaganda that His Holiness the Dalai Lama is asking for 'high degree' or 'greater autonomy' and 'greater Tibet' as if we are asking something more than those guaranteed by the constitution.

These aspirations spring from our conviction that a single administration for all Tibetans who inhabit the Tibetan Plateau will enhance the ability of the Tibetan people to keep intact our civilization whose values are becoming increasingly appreciated by the larger international community.

Since we have accepted to remain within the constitutional framework of PRC, we identify ourselves as an autonomous constituent of PRC. Therefore, we are as patriotic towards PRC as any citizens of the People's Republic of China, including the majority Han nationality. Therefore, labeling us as unpatriotic or separatist is entirely baseless and unjustifiable. It reveals the attitude of the PRC leadership in general and particularly the behavior of the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region and the United Front Work Department officials. We suspect that to keep Tibet issue unresolved is their political compulsion and they are in great need to identify a section of us whom they could project as separatists, and a threat to unity and stability, for their own survival in power.

During the last five rounds of dialogue, His Holiness the Dalai Lama's envoys have made our aspirations crystal clear as mentioned above. We have left no room for doubt about our intention or about any hidden agenda behind this. Yet the PRC leadership remains suspicious and tries to promote the notion, both at the national and international level, that His Holiness the Dalai Lama is insincere. We do not understand whether their suspicion is real or just pretence or using suspicion as a political tactic.

An ancient Tibetan proverb says, "The Chinese are ruined by suspicion and the Tibetans are ruined by hope." This might prove. Under such circumstances, a number of Tibetans and Tibet supporters are pointing to us that PRC has no trust in His Holiness the Dalai Lama and have asked us, you people, why are you trusting them and continuing to pursue the process of dialogue? Our response to this question is what Gandhi said, as a Satyagrahi you must trust your opponent, they are also human beings. So each human person has the potential of enlightenment and potential of becoming trust worthy. On that basis we put our trust in the PRC leadership and pursue the present process. We believe that sooner or later their conscience will awake and will respond to the call of truth. You may also interpret our behavior as what the ancient proverb says, "The Tibetans are ruined by hope." Time will judge.

We are proud that my administration and the people are, by and large, not carried away by the most provocative propagandas and actions taken by the so-called TAR authorities and some of the PRC leadership during the last twelve months. On the contrary, we have gained much self-confidence and faith in the course of our action. We are determined that our moral attitude will not be lowered as done by the PRC leadership. We are working on a different moral and ethical ground. We trust the inner conscience of PRC leadership will bring it to the same level.

Our basic and immediate concerns are threefold: the preservation of Tibetan culture, the identity of Tibetan nationality and the environment of the Tibetan Plateau. All these three are in great danger. The change of demographic situation has adversely affected the unique culture and civilization of Tibet, including its rich language. It also causes racial discrimination and marginalisation of the Tibetan people not only politically but socially and economically. Uncontrolled and unnatural increase of population and ill-planned growth of infrastructure and exploitation of natural resources have resulted in great destruction of the Tibetan Plateau's ecology and Tibetan identity is on the verge of extinction.

The Tibetan cultural heritage and its identity and the eco-system of Tibetan Plateau are not only relevant to Tibetan people alone but it has very deep connections with all humanity and the planet Earth as a whole. The degradation of Tibetan environment and pollution and disturbance in the rivers will affect the entire Asia, including mainland China. Therefore, our struggle with the PRC is neither on the ground of political ideology nor for political power or racial conflict. It's a struggle for a survival of an ancient civilization which has great value for the people of China as well.

Ever since the new railway line to Lhasa became operational in July 2006, it has facilitated the Chinese population transfer to the Plateau, contributed to the deterioration of Tibet's environment and the pollution of its water and provided easier means of exploitation of Tibet's enormous natural resources, causing huge damage to the land and all those who inhabit it.

On the other hand, the unprecedented budget outlay for the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region for its 11th Five-Year Plan amounts to 100 billion yuan (US \$ 12.95 billion) for 180 projects. A few identified projects are the extension of the railway line to Shigatse, a new airport each in Ngari and Shigatse, the construction of several hydropower plants, and the construction of facilities for mining of gold and copper. There is another project that is aimed at improving the facilities and enlarging the schools not in Tibet but in China where the students from Tibet study. The combined costs of these projects constitute a fraction of the total budget. It is a matter of concern for us that where the rest of the money will be spent and the nature of the many projects that have not yet been identified.

Though these known projects may be well intentioned, but the cumulative impact of these projects do not meet the real needs of the Tibetan people. They will further prove devastating for the Tibetan people's culture and their way of life. The real needs of the Tibetan people are adequate livelihood, healthcare, education and the use and practice of Tibetan language and religion respectively. If China really cares for the People of Tibet and wants their loyalty, China must give priority to the concerns and aspirations of the Tibetan people in its development plans for Tibet.

In exile we Tibetans have followed His Holiness the Dalai Lama's advice of hoping for the best and preparing for the worst. So while we are hoping for an immediate resolution of the Tibet issue, we are preparing for thousand years of struggle. I am proud to announce that in exile under the leadership of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, we Tibetans enjoy unprecedented unity. As we mentioned in our March 10 Statement of 2007, this is due in part because the heads of all religious traditions are in exile. They are more than supportive of the efforts of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to maintain a cohesive community that looks after its poor and elderly, gives a decent education to its children and has succeeded in preserving the integrity of Tibet's spiritual and cultural heritage.

The unity and vibrance of the Tibetan exiles is based on the inspiring leadership of all the heads of different religious traditions and their devotion to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. This unity is also based on the deep-rooted democratic institutions that His Holiness the Dalai Lama has over the years insisted must be introduced into the administration and the larger exile community. Today the Tibetan administration is functioning with an independent tribunal, and a directly elected political leadership accountable to a robust parliament, which should and does double up as an effective opposition in our party-less democracy, all under the scrutiny of a boisterous free press. The exile community is also serviced by many NGOs, who are transforming themselves into an active and durable civil society, which has the potential of running the exile community with or without the benefit of an administration.

The message I would like to convey from this important platform is we have made all preparations to ensure that the Tibetan community in exile is capable of helping to advance the struggle of the

Tibetan people to the very day the issue of Tibet is resolved to the satisfaction of the majority will of the Tibetan people. It is the fervent desire of every Tibetan that day dawns soon.

To conclude, I would reiterate our commitment to the Middle-Way policy and non-violent means. Regardless of the indifferent attitude and provocative actions of the PRC leadership and its functionaries, we shall remain committed to these values and continue our effort from generation to generation until the issue of Tibet is resolved.

Finally, I would like to express my appreciation to all those gathered here to lend your active support for the non-violent struggle of the Tibetan people. We the Tibetan people owe you a great debt of gratitude. It is the common prayer of all the Tibetan people that our common efforts will soon bear fruit.

I thank Madame Anne-Marie Lizin, the former president of the Belgian Senate and the Mayor of Huy, for inaugurating this conference.

We are also enormously grateful to the government and people of Belgium for allowing us to convene this conference in Brussels.

I would also like to express the appreciation of the Tibetan people and my administration to the Friedrich Nauman Stiftung for its support for the last many years to finance this important forum which gives us the opportunity to express the concerns of the Tibetan people and the means to address them. I would like to thank Dr. Wolfgang Gerhardt, the new Chairman of the Friedrich Nauman Stiftung, for continuing the work done by his predecessor, Count Lambsdorff.

I thank Mr. Walter Muls, the President of the Belgian Inter-Parliamentary Group for Tibet for co-hosting this conference.

In conclusion, we all pray that His Holiness the Dalai Lama will continue to enjoy good health and be in our midst for a long time to continue to give us inspiration, courage and hope to the Tibetans and to the world.

Thank you