

Valedictory Speech
5th International Tibet Support Groups Conference
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Brussels, 14th May 2007

Es gilt das gesprochene Wort!

Your Excellency Professor Rimpoché,
Members of Parliament
Dear Kalon Tempa Tsering
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,

As Executive Chairman of the Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung für die Freiheit – and this means: the Foundation for Freedom and Liberty –, it is a pleasure for me to address you at the end of this 5th International Tibet Support Group Conference.

The process leading up to this conference was not easy, and the conference itself started off with a lot of question marks. Of course, our main matter of concern and unhappiness was the fact that His Holiness the Dalai Lama found himself in a position in which he had to decide not to attend this conference. We have talked about the reasons of his decision in this conference, and both the organizers and the participants have strongly reacted to them.

On behalf of the Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung für die Freiheit, I would like to repeat our complete and utter failure to understand the position of the Belgian Government, which made it a point to send its Ambassador from Washington to Houston, Texas, in order to personally convey the message to His Holiness that he is not welcome in Belgium at this point in time. There are probably more diplomatic terms to describe the contents of the meeting, but this is what has really happened in Houston.

Whereas pressure and interventions from the part of the Chinese Government were foreseeable, the reaction of the Belgian Government, the Government of a democratic state of the European

Union which is expected to uphold the principles and values of a free society, is unacceptable. It hurts to experience this to happen in the liberal political family.

The Belgian Government knew very well that His Holiness was about to visit Brussels as the Capital of Europe. He was to meet the President of the European Parliament, Hans-Gert Poettering, an appointment which was fixed through the good services of Graf Lambsdorff and no other than the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel.

Dr. Gehrhardt and Graf Lambsdorff have already made strong points in condemning this kind of behavior, but allow me to repeat: There is no acceptable explanation or excuse for effectively barring an eminent world personality like His Holiness the Dalai Lama from attending a conference of this kind – a person which stands for the values of democracy, tolerance, justice and peaceful dialogue.

It was never easy to organize International Tibet Support Group Conferences. Way back in 1996, the German Government blocked its financial support, in a blatant deviation from its prior commitments. Only by way of a successful fund-raising campaign, we were able to mobilize the German public and finally hold the conference three weeks later. The Friedrich-Naumann-Foundation paid a heavy price for this success, because only four weeks after the Conference, we had to close down our office in Beijing.

In 2000, things were again problematic, due to Chinese pressure in light of the visit of the Chinese Premier to Germany. In 2003, our friends in the Czech Republic withstood severe Chinese pressure, and we had a very successful event in Prague. Allow me to again express my gratitude to our friends from Forum 2000, and to Former President Vaclav Havel, without whose strong commitment to our goals and objectives the 4th International Tibet Support Groups Conference would probably not have materialized.

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends, I am proud that despite all of the problems and pressures that were exerted in the past and in presence, my Foundation never deviated from its course, and that we were able to put in our share to make these events possible. Our course is determined by the cause of freedom. This is why only a few days ago, on 25th April 2007, we have given ourselves a new corporate identity, and – if you like – a new designation: The Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung für die Freiheit, that is the Foundation for Freedom and Liberty. This new designation points directly to the focus of our work, which we carry out in Germany and more

than 60 countries worldwide. We work for more freedom in political, social and economic relations – and this is what we want to make clear to the public through our new designation. For us, there are no compromises or double standards with regard to the focus of our aims, and to the reasons behind our projects and activities. Our identity is our work for freedom – and we will celebrate our 50th Anniversary in May 2008.

This is also the main principle in our long-standing relationship with the Tibetans-in-Exile. Under the guidance of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the Tibetans-in-Exile have opted for a struggle of peaceful means to achieve more freedom for the Tibetan Community, a struggle which is based on the concepts of justice, peace, autonomy and democracy.

Let me repeat the commitment of Wolfgang Gerhardt from last Friday, stated in this hall: We will continue our partnership with our Tibetan friends.

This was also the message that Count Lambsdorff conveyed to His Holiness the Dalai Lama when he called on him yesterday morning in Leipzig for a long, very personal and very open conversation.

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends, this is the fourth Conference of Tibet Support Groups which I personally attend in my capacity as Executive Chairman of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, the Stiftung für die Freiheit. I do not want to conceal from you that despite all of my disappointment and frustration prior to the conference – which I know was shared by my colleagues, and by you, the participants – I leave Brussels, after four days of intense work by the participants and the facilitators, in a very positive and optimistic mood.

First of all, we had more participants than ever. 315 representatives from Tibet Support Groups from 56 countries joined us here, many entirely on their own expenses. This in itself is a great success.

But even more important is the atmosphere in which this conference was conducted. In my view, this was the most focused and the most professional International Conference of Tibet Support Groups ever.

The Conference in Prague four years ago was already a certain breakthrough. For the first time, we had hired not only experienced, but also very committed moderators who guided us through our work with the clear aim to come up with meaningful results and realistic perspectives.

This year in Brussels, we were able to repeat this kind of professionalism, and more than that – we were able to learn from earlier shortcomings and mistakes; we improved, we got better in conducting the conference, in getting even more, and more meaningful, deliberations, and in formulating more concrete policies and initiatives.

Let me, therefore, express my deep gratitude and respect to the moderators Patrick Nash, Lois Graessle, Amanda Stone and Philip Rudge. You were great, and you were instrumental for the success of this conference!

In the same context, I would like to thank our interpreters! You had a most difficult task, making the communication between people from all parts of the world possible. Without your skills, your patience and your understanding we could not have such a successful event!

But I am not only impressed by the professionalism I have experienced here. I am also convinced that the 5th International Tibet Support Group Conference was the most *political* conference of its kind which we have had so far.

The action plan, based on the different objectives and activities formulated by the participants, present a very meaningful political framework which, I am sure, will not only guide the future work of many Support Groups in individual countries, but which will also have great impact on the Central Tibetan Administration. Against all odds, this conference did strengthen the partnership between the International Tibet Support Movement and the democratic institutions of the Tibetans-in-Exile! I would like to especially thank Dr. Michael van Waalt van Prague for the excellent and constructive way he guided us through the difficult task of formulating the Conference Action Plan.

I do not want to conceal from you that I was particularly impressed by the statements we have heard from Professor Samdong Rinpoche, the Kalon Tripa of the CTA, and by Lodi Gyari Rinpoche, Special Envoy of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. These statements were very open, they were honest and thoughtful, they gave all of us insights into the feelings and the positions of the Tibetan leadership, and they showed us the directions for the future of the Movement for Tibet. In my view, the deliberations of these two eminent leaders of the Tibetan People went far ahead of previous speeches and statements at International Support Group Conferences. Prof Rinpoche, Lodi Gary, I take your inputs at this conference as a sign of the trust and faith that you

have in this group of supporters, and on behalf of everyone in this hall, I would like to express my deep gratitude to you.

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends, I think that there is another important signal that goes out from this Brussels Conference: *China cannot prevent us from our political work for justice, human rights and freedom for the Tibetan People – China cannot destroy the Tibetan Support Movement!*

Yes, it is true, we would have liked His Holiness to be here. But even his absence could not make us deviate from our course. Quite the contrary, there have never been more concrete, more focused policies been formulated in the struggle for the Tibetan Cause. The Chinese may be able to obstruct travel plans of His Holiness, but they are not able to stop the train to freedom for the Tibetan People – because of their worldwide support for their just cause. This is the message that goes out from Brussels, and this is the message that will certainly be heard and well understood in Beijing – especially in light of the upcoming Olympic Games in 2008!

I have no doubts that this event in Brussels will lead to even more determined work of the TSGs worldwide, in even clearer and more outspoken positioning for the just cause of Tibet. This is what is needed at this point in history. We have to fight for our interests, we have to bind more and more people to the just cause, we have to find more allies, especially among Parliamentarians and Decision-Makers worldwide.

The Olympic Games next year will play an important role in this respect. They are an excellent opportunity for the Tibet Support Movement to highlight the needs of this struggle. But let me also add my wish that all initiatives and campaigns that individual TSGs may plan and carry out be sensible and be directed to gain political support to the just cause; they should reflect the political perspectives, and should not endanger the personal safety of anyone – Chinese supporters included!

The Olympic Games will not only present opportunities for the Tibet Support Movement, they will also be an opportunity for the Chinese Leadership! Time and again, we from Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung für die Freiheit have expressed our vision that, one day, China will join the free world. The last example in kind was Dr. Gerhardt's speech in this hall last Friday. I do not want to give up the hope that the Chinese Leadership will realize the long-term benefits which China herself will gain from a solution of the Tibet issue, and I do not see a better point in time than the Olympics to show to the world that China, this great country, accepts the norms and

values of the free and civilized world. China has the chance to show to the whole world that we all live in the same age.

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends, allow me to express my gratitude to some more people without whose enthusiasm and engagement this conference could not have been realized. Jampal Chosang and Tensing Wangmo Dunchu from the Representative Office of the CTA here in Brussels and in Paris have done an incredible work to lay the ground work for the organization of this event. They have also kept the contacts to our Foundation and to the political authorities in Belgium – not an easy task, as all of you can imagine!

I am especially glad to have met my old friend Tempa Tsering again, this time as Kalon for Information and International Relations. We met for the first time in 1996, in the context for the 2nd International Tibet Support Group Conference. Dear Tempa, I know that the months and weeks prior to this conference were not easy for you. You had to shoulder many responsibilities, and the political circumstances that emerged here in Brussels were as unfortunate for you – if not even more so – than for us and anyone else involved. I am very glad to see you here in your good old spirit, and I look forward to many more meetings with you in the future course of our friendship.

It was mentioned earlier that we received financial support to a considerable extent from private donations. I am grateful to everyone who contributed his or her share to make this Conference possible, and I would like to especially mention the Isedell-Foundation for its very generous support.

Last but not least my thanks go to my colleagues in the Foundation, especially here in Brussels and in New Delhi for their tireless efforts to take part in the preparation and realization of this important Conference. My thanks go to Rene Klaff and Rebon Banerjee from New Delhi, and to Juergen Wickert, Susanne Hartig and the entire Office of the International Political Dialogue here in Brussels.

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends, attending this conference, I was reminded of Martin Luther King who once stated so famously “I have a dream!” As the cause for which he stood shows very clearly: Dreams and Visions are preconditions for Reality!! Let me, therefore, conclude by saying: I have a dream – a dream of justice, peace and freedom for the Tibetan People – to be achieved in our life time!

Thank you!