

Press statement by Kalon Tempa Tsering regarding His Holiness the Dalai Lama not being able to participate at the Tibet conference in Brussels

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I AM SAD to say that because of Chinese pressure which created inconvenience to the Belgian government, His Holiness the Dalai Lama is not able to attend the 5th International Conference of Tibet Support Groups to be held in Brussels from 11 to 14 May 2007.

The Belgian government made repeated requests to His Holiness to reconsider his visit to Brussels in May. Finally, during His Holiness the Dalai Lama's recent visit to the United States, the Belgian ambassador to the United States, His Excellency Dominique Struye de Swielande, called upon His Holiness. The ambassador shared with His Holiness his government's predicament on account of pressure from the People's Republic of China in connection with the upcoming visit of a Belgian trade delegation led by the Crown Prince.

In response, His Holiness said that the decision not to visit Brussels was more difficult this time than it was in 2005. That year the Belgian government had for the first time requested him to postpone his visit to Belgium because his presence in the country coincided with the Belgian king's visit to China. This time His Holiness was specifically attending the Tibet Support Group Conference, which would be attended by about 300 friends of Tibet from about 60 countries. However, His Holiness said that he understood the Belgian government's position and acceded to its request.

A message from His Holiness the Dalai Lama to explain the background of his decision would be read to the participants at the inauguration of the conference on 11 May.

The Chinese government's persistent attempts to exert pressure on small nations to restrict the movement of His Holiness the Dalai Lama is a case of outright bullying, gross interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state, setting an unfortunate trend in international diplomacy and undermines the efforts that have been made to create a conducive atmosphere for a just and speedy resolution of the issue of Tibet.

We know that this decision by His Holiness the Dalai Lama will disappoint many participants at the conference and the general Belgian public. However, His Holiness does not in any way wish to inconvenience any host government. This decision of His Holiness the Dalai Lama is in accordance with his conviction that his first responsibility as a citizen of the world is to be of service to humanity. As a Buddhist monk, his second responsibility is to serve as a bridge between different religious denominations so that all religions could collectively contribute to peace and harmony. And as a Tibetan, his third responsibility is to serve the cause of Tibet and the Tibetan people.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama inaugurated all the previous four International Tibet Support Group Conferences. The first International Tibet Support Group Conference was held in 1990 at Dharamsala in north-west India, the seat of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and his administration. The second International Tibet Support Group Conference was held in Bonn in 1996, the third in Berlin in 2000 and the fourth in Prague in 2003, when former Czech President Vaclav Havel joined His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

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