

Dialogue Between the Dalai Lama's Envoys and the Chinese Government

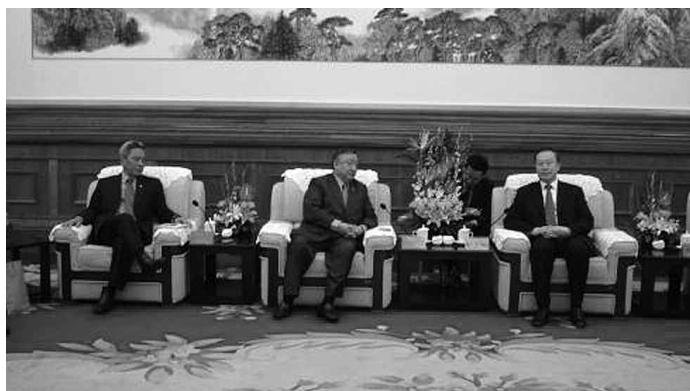
IN SEPTEMBER 2002, THE ENVOYS OF THE DALAI LAMA ARRIVED IN BEIJING to take part in what has become the most serious round of Sino-Tibetan talks since the early 1990s. The dialogue has been conducted on behalf of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) by officials (principally ministers and vice ministers) of the United Front Work Department, which serves as a gatekeeper for “non-Party” groups and individuals, both foreign and domestic, engaging with the Party on a select range of issues. The latest round of dialogue took place from January 26-31, 2010 in China and ended with each side well aware of its differences; but also with hope from Lodi Gyari Gyaltzen, Special Envoy of the Dalai Lama, suggesting the possibility of “finding a common ground on these issues” (see: <http://www.savetibet.org/media-center/ict-press-releases/9th-round-sino-tibetan-dialogue-identifies-elements-build-upon>).

Since conceding Tibetan independence in the late 1980s, the Dalai Lama has sought to achieve genuine autonomy for Tibetans within the People's Republic of China (PRC) pursuing his “Middle Way Approach.” An official articulation of the Dalai Lama's Middle Way Approach came about through years of internal discussions among the Tibetan Government in Exile as a response to the changes in the political atmosphere during the late 1980s and to the late Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping's offer to the Dalai Lama that “except independence, all other issues can be resolved through negotiations.” According to the Dalai Lama's web-

site, the basic goal of the Middle Way Approach is to “peacefully resolve the issue of Tibet and to bring about stability and co-existence between the Tibetan and Chinese peoples based on equality and mutual co-operation.” (For more information visit: <http://dalailama.com/messages/middle-way-approach>).

Central to the Tibetan position is the political right of autonomy provided to all Tibetans living in contiguous Tibetan areas, an area roughly defined by the geography of the Tibetan plateau, governed by a single administrative unit under a single unified policy. According to the Chinese government's own analysis of its law on regional ethnic autonomy, the Tibetan people are entitled to the full political right of autonomy: full decision-making power in economic and social development undertakings; freedom to inherit and develop traditional culture and to practice religious belief; freedom to administer, protect and be the first to utilize natural resources; and freedom to independently develop educational and cultural undertakings.

The Tibet Autonomous Region was set up by the Chinese government in 1964. Surrounding areas on the Tibetan plateau, now incorporated into Chinese provinces, have also been designated by the government as Tibetan autonomous prefectures and counties. However, Tibetan autonomy as provided for in the Chinese Constitution and laws has failed to deliver genuine autonomy to Tibetans. According to the Dalai Lama in his 2007 March 10th statement, “The problem is that [regional ethnic autonomy] is not implemented fully, and thus fails to serve its express purpose of preserving and protecting the distinct identity, culture and language of the minority nationalities. What happens on the ground is that large populations from the majority nationalities have spread in these minority regions. Therefore, the minority nationalities, instead of being able to preserve their own identity, culture and language, have no choice but to depend on the language and customs of the majority nationality in their day to day lives.” (For analysis of the statement please visit: <http://www.savetibet.org/media-center/ict-news-reports/dalai-lama-pays-tribute-spirit-tibetan-people-march-10-statement>.)



Envoys to the Dalai Lama, Lodi Gyari (center) and Kelsang Gyaltzen (left) meet with Chinese Party official Du Qinglin (right).

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Despite this, the Dalai Lama has hope that a solution for Tibet is possible through dialogue, he says: “I firmly believe that this is of mutual benefit both to the Tibetans and the Chinese. We Tibetans will be able to develop Tibet with China’s assistance, while at the same time preserving our own unique culture, spirituality, and delicate environment. By amicably resolving the Tibetan issue, China will be able to contribute to her own unity and stability.”

Support for meaningful, substantive dialogue between the two sides has come not only externally from governments and heads of state, but increasingly from within China. Public awareness of the Sino-Tibetan dialogue, although limited, created a new space for discussion of Tibet. One document circulating among Chinese Party officials stated, “Anyone who thinks the Tibet issue should be dragged on until after the death of the 14th Dalai Lama is naïve, unwise, and [supporting] the wrong policy.” A provocative essay by Beijing-based Wang Lixiong was entitled “The Dalai Lama is the Key to the Tibet Problem.” (See: Sino-Tibetan Dialogue in the Post-Mao era: Lessons and Prospects by Tashi Rabgey and Tseten Wangchuk Sharlho, www.east-westcenter.org.)

Over the past eight years of dialogue there have been few tangible results; however developments in the eighth and ninth rounds give indication that there is still hope for a mutually beneficial solution for Tibet. A concrete action plan for a meaningful way forward in Tibet within the Constitutional framework of the PRC was set forth by the Dalai Lama’s Special Envoys during the 8th round of dialogue in the “Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy for Tibetan People” (full text: <http://savetibet.org/policy-center/topics-fact-sheets/memorandum-genuine-autonomy-tibetan-people>) and clarified in the “Note on the Memorandum” during the 9th round (full text: <http://savetibet.org/policy-center/topics-fact-sheets/note-memorandum-genuine-autonomy-tibetan-people>). Immediately preceding the 9th round of dialogue, many high officials in the Communist party met for the “Fifth Work Forum on Tibet” (see: <http://www.savetibet.org/media-center/ict-news-reports/top-level-meeting-beijing-sets-strategy-tibet>) where they set their future strategy on Tibet. While the Chairman of the United Front Work Department of the Communist Party, Zhu Weiqun, told the press following the 9th round that there was no possibility of the “slightest compromise” on the issue of sovereignty, Lodi Gyari made clear that the Dalai Lama’s proposal does not challenge sovereignty and that “many of the issues prioritized

by the Forum are similar to the basic needs of the Tibetan people outlined in our Memorandum” (see: <http://www.savetibet.org/media-center/ict-press-releases/9th-round-sino-tibetan-dialogue-identifies-elements-build-upon>).

The Memorandum and its accompanying Note on the Memorandum set forth a practical outline for peacefully establishing a mutually beneficial solution by highlighting several of the most salient requests central to Tibetan discontent in China, including:

- The establishment of one autonomous Tibetan unit, such that all Tibetan autonomous areas fall under one central autonomous authority;
- Tibetan language as the official language of the autonomous area, taught in schools and spoken for official autonomous business;
- Protection of Tibetan culture as provided under Chinese Law on Regional National Autonomy;
- Free practice of religion without interference from the state;
- Improved education programs involving science and technology;
- Environmental protection and conservation programs in Tibet involving Tibetan stakeholder involvement in control over natural resources;
- Self-reliance in economic development and trade, however, this will not constitute a return to pre-1959 systems;
- Improved public health with inclusion of traditional Tibetan medicine;
- Public security forces must understand and respect Tibetan culture, however, this does not call for withdrawal of PLA troops; and
- Control over migration and population transfer to ensure that Tibetan population is not diluted by influx of Han migrants, however, this does not call for the expulsion of non-Tibetans already settled in Tibet.

The Dalai Lama’s envoys have reiterated to the Chinese officials that upon the establishment of a truly autonomous Tibet, the Tibetan Government in Exile will dissolve and the Dalai Lama will hold no political position in Tibet. Additionally, the Dalai Lama has repeatedly emphasized his offers to cooperate with Chinese leaders to make these requests a reality.