



One Hundred and Fourteenth Congress

Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Hearing:

Tibet & China: Searching for a New Way Forward

Opening Statement

July 14, 2015

- Co-Chairman McGovern, distinguished panelists and guests, I am pleased that the Commission is holding this hearing - one on such an important subject and at a juncture as critical as today.
- Fifty-six years have passed since the Tibetan Rebellion of 1959, when Tibetans attempted to declare independence from China. The uprising led to the deaths of more than 80,000 Tibetans, and thousands more have fled to India, Nepal and other countries.
- Despite the formal establishment of the Tibet Autonomous Region in 1965 – which constitutes just under half of what Tibetan exiles claim to be historical Tibet – the Chinese government continues to instate policies that are hostile to Tibetan religion, culture, language and identity.
- Tibetans have experienced a strict repression of civil rights, including restrictions on the freedoms of speech, religion, association, assembly and movement, including domestic and foreign travel. The Chinese government customarily vilifies the Dalai Lama and reportedly accuses the “Dalai clique” and ‘other outside forces’ for instigating unrest and political instability.
- The Chinese government has gone so far as to attempt to dictate spiritual matters of the Tibetan people, particularly the reincarnation process for Tibetan spiritual leaders.

- Soon after the Dali Lama identified Gedhun Choekyi Myima as Tibetan Buddhism's 11th Panchen Lama in 1995, Chinese authorities placed him in what they deemed "protective custody" and his whereabouts have remained unknown for the last two decades.
- This pervasive meddling in religious affairs is a gross violation of religious freedom. Any decision on the next Dalai Lama, or any other matter of Tibetan religious affairs, should be determined by Tibetan Buddhist leaders and the Tibetan people.
- Moreover, the State Department has reported "serious human rights abuses" of Tibetans in 2014, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, severe mistreatment, torture, and deaths of Tibetan detainees and prisoners of conscience.
- We are deeply saddened to hear of the death of one such political prisoner – Tenzin Delek Rinpoche – over the weekend. Tenzin Delek was serving a 20-year sentence following "charges of terror and incitement of separatism" in 2002. Tenzin Delek was denied medical parole despite repeated calls by his family, human rights organizations and the international community.
- As of 2014, the Congressional-Executive Commission on China has identified 639 Tibetan political prisoners and detainees, though the actual number of detainees may be much higher.
- China is a growing leader in the international community, and as such, it is integral that the Chinese government cease its flagrant disregard for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of its people.
- The United States and the international community must continue to engage the Chinese government, His Holiness the Dali Lama and representatives of the Tibetan people to reach a negotiated settlement that ensures Tibetan autonomy.

- I thank the witnesses for their participation here today, and look forward to working with the administration, NGO's and my colleagues in Congress to determine a new way forward for Tibet.
- I yield back to my distinguished Co-Chair, Mr. McGovern.