

**Statement of Lama Kyap Gazan for Tibet 101 Briefing
Before the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, April 21, 2015**

Good afternoon. My name is Lama Kyap Gazan, and I would like to thank the Commission for holding this briefing on the important topic of Tibet, and for inviting me to participate. I am a Tibetan American, born and raised in northeastern Tibet, in today's Qinghai Province of the People's Republic of China. After graduating from Qinghai Education College in 1991, I taught Tibetan language and legal studies at the Qinghai Provincial School of Politics and Law in Siling (Xining in Chinese) to both Tibetan and Chinese students. At that time, there was virtually no opportunity for young Tibetan children in Xining to study Tibetan language, so I started a school in 1993, together with a fellow Tibetan. The school focused on Tibetan language and culture, and we had received prior permission to open the school from local authorities. However, a month later, authorities arrived at the school and took me into custody while my students watched. I was detained, interrogated, and tortured repeatedly for 32 days and subsequently hospitalized for 2 and a half months.

I was not formally charged with a crime and was eventually released. But I faced constant harassment from the authorities and I worried for my family's safety and my own. We could not continue living under such circumstances, so in 1994, I arranged for my wife to escape with our baby daughter to India. I left for India soon thereafter, but we had to leave our older daughter behind with my parents. We lived in India for six years before we came to the United States in 2000. In 2012, after 18 long years -- with assistance from Senator Ben Cardin and

Representative Chris Van Hollen, as well as my Maryland state senator, Karen Montgomery -- my elder daughter was finally allowed to join us in the U.S., and our family was reunited.

Today, based on my personal experience and monitoring of the current situation in Tibet, I would like to make a few remarks on several issues facing Tibetan people in Tibet: first, deprivation of their linguistic rights regarding the Tibetan language; second, the abuses suffered by Tibetans in the law enforcement system. I will also speak briefly about mass relocation of nomads and farmers, and self-immolations.

Linguistic Rights

First, the Chinese government does not tolerate any assertion of Tibetan identity even when it relates only to the preservation and promotion of the Tibetan language, which is fundamental to our religion, culture, and identity. In my own case, the Chinese authorities detained and tortured me for 32 days in 1993 because of my effort to promote Tibetan language and identity.

Nearly 20 years later, on November 9, 2012, several thousand Tibetan students in my hometown, Rebkong, took to the streets to demand the right to have Tibetan be their language of instruction in the schools. In recent years, Tibetans have undertaken a number of peaceful demonstrations -- which spread from my hometown to other parts of Tibet, and even to Beijing -- over plans to restrict the use of the Tibetan language. Just this week, the International Campaign for Tibet released a report about new regulations issued by authorities in my

hometown warning that various activities, including praying and lighting butter-lamps for the Dalai Lama, or calling for linguistic rights, are “illegal” and will be penalized.

Torture/Abuse

The next issue I would like to discuss is torture and mistreatment of Tibetans by Chinese law enforcement personnel. Tibetans are routinely tortured when they are detained and investigated, often without being charged with a crime. After authorities detained me, I was questioned about once every three days, during which time I was placed in a chair and secured with cuffs and a belt. Quite often, two teenage guards would beat and kick me. Electric cattle prods were used on my neck, forehead and hands. After one such beating, I fell unconscious and only later noticed blood oozing from my legs -- the result of being beaten. A four-inch-long scar is still visible below my right knee.

Since the widespread demonstrations across Tibet in 2008, torture appears to have become more widespread and directed at a broader cross section of society in Tibet. Between 2009 and 2014, there have been many reported cases of torture of Tibetans, documented by NGOs, media, and governments. Although torture is prohibited under Chinese law, it is rampant in Tibet’s judicial and law enforcement system, a result both of a political emphasis on ensuring “stability” and a culture of impunity.

Mass relocation and development

My people have pride in our religion, tradition, culture, language, and way of life. However, because of misguided policies of the Chinese government, our way of life, and our survival as a people, is being seriously threatened. Most of the Tibetans in Tibet live in rural areas, as

nomads and farmers. In recent years, the Chinese government has subjected Tibetans to a policy of mass relocation that radically changes their way of life. It has been reported that since 2006, over two million Tibetan nomads have been “rehoused” in permanent housing or urban areas. When Tibetan nomads are resettled in such state-mandated programs, most are not able to adapt, and eventually they begin to lose their religious, cultural, and linguistic traditions. Without their traditional livelihood, and without necessary skills or access to other employment opportunities, Tibetan nomads end up being economically marginalized, driven to desperation, and traditional values erode.

In its effort to use development as a vehicle to win over the Tibetan people, the Chinese government has launched many projects without any consideration of the local situation, threatening the fragile environment of the plateau, which is the source of water to millions of people in Asia.

Self-immolations

To date, 139 Tibetans have self-immolated since 2009, including two earlier this month, one of which was a nun who is believed to have died. Most of the self-immolators have called for the return of the Dalai Lama and freedom for Tibet, or otherwise criticized Chinese government policies in Tibet. These latest self-immolations occurred in an environment of heightened security across Tibet. Chinese authorities have called for monasteries and nunneries to become centers for their propaganda. Monasteries are being ordered to fly the Chinese flag. The Chinese Communist Party requires monks and nuns to “love their country,” and recognize the authority of the Party above all other allegiances. In addition, Party officials have been stationed in monasteries since 2012.

Conclusion

Tibetans continue to be imprisoned for simply exercising their fundamental human rights. It is a suffocating situation in Tibet today; the wave of self-immolations is indicative of the desperation many Tibetans feel. Nevertheless, the United States and American people can play a role in alleviating the plight of the Tibetan people. Through past experience, we know that on account of the consistent raising of the Tibetan issue with the Chinese authorities, quite a few Tibetan political prisoners have been released to the United States. They include, among others, Ngawang Sangdrol and Takna Jigme Sangpo. From my own experience while in Tibet, I know that voices of support from outside do make a difference to people in Tibet. I know that Tibetans in Tibet look to the United States as an old friend and a great nation that believes in justice and freedom for all people throughout the world, including Tibet. I therefore would like to end by requesting all of you to do whatever you can to help the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan people.