

**Testimony by Matteo Mecacci
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**Tibet 101 Briefing
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission
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First, I would like to thank the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission and co- chairs Representative McGovern and Representative Pitts for holding this briefing on Tibet. The International Campaign for Tibet greatly appreciates the opportunity to participate in this briefing.

While there are many important issues to address regarding the situation in Tibet, I will touch briefly on several topics and conclude with recommendations that Congress and the Administration can take that would help improve the situation in Tibet. First, the issue of self-immolations and abuses of the criminal justice system; second, restrictions on access to Tibet and the recent White Paper issued by the Chinese government; third, the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama and religious freedom, and finally, a few comments on the need for resumption of dialogue between the Chinese government and Tibetan representatives, and coordinated action on Tibet among democratic countries.

1) The Tibetan people continue to resist injustice without resorting to violence. Since the mass demonstrations of 2008 --in which around 200 Tibetans were killed and thousands were imprisoned -- (those were the biggest demonstrations in Tibet since the uprising of the Tibetan people in 1959) - 139 Tibetans have self-

immolated in a call for freedom for Tibetans and for the return of the Dalai Lama in Tibet. None of the self-immolators injured any other individual or property while engaging in this drastic form of protest. None of them. At least twenty of them have survived and their fate or whereabouts are uncertain. Over a hundred of their relatives and friends have been detained, sentenced or have disappeared through forms of “collective punishment” adopted by the Chinese government that are reminiscent of the methods used by the dictatorships of the last century, and in China historically, but contravene Chinese law and international human rights standards.

Hundreds of political prisoners remain in prison today and any form of expression of Tibetan identity, be it religious, linguistic or cultural, can be easily criminalized due to the adoption of a patchwork of regulations that deny fundamental and basic human rights.

Despite all of this, the commitment to nonviolence of the Tibetan people and of their spiritual leader in exile, the Dalai Lama, remains strong and should be lauded, supported and encouraged by the international community, in a world where political violence is increasing.

In its new “White Paper” on Tibet, mentioned previously, the Chinese government repeats its allegation that the Dalai Lama has orchestrated the self-immolations.

The Dalai Lama responded to this outrageous allegation in the past requesting that an independent investigation be conducted in Tibet to ascertain the real causes of the self-immolations. ICT calls on the US Congress and the Administration to press

China to allow such an independent investigation to be conducted in Tibet. If China is confident of what it says, it can easily open Tibet to an independent investigation.

2) Access to Tibet continues to be a serious problem. Tibet is one of the least accessible places in the world for American journalists, officials, citizens and NGOs. Even in Pyongyang, North Korea, there are a couple of foreign correspondents; in Lhasa, there is none. The Chinese government has not accepted the request of the US Government to open a consulate in Lhasa, while China pushes to have more consulates in the United States. Because of the severity of the restrictions, and consequences of lack of access to Tibet, the International Campaign for Tibet strongly supports the passage of the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act (HR 1112) that the co-chairs of the Commission have introduced in the House and that aims at promoting greater access to Tibet for American citizens, journalists and diplomats.

Another troubling statement that appears in the “White Paper” on Tibet is the Chinese government’s continued insistence that the Dalai Lama should recognize that “Tibet has been an integral part of China since antiquity.” The Dalai Lama has said for decades that he does not seek an independent Tibet, and he has stated many times that he cannot say what is not true: that, in fact, Tibet has not been historically part of China. Moreover, including this question of history in a political negotiation, as China has done in the past and continues to do today, which should instead be left to historians to debate, exemplifies the unwillingness of the Chinese government to find a mutually acceptable solution with the Tibetans.

3) ICT has recently documented increased restrictions on religious practice and freedom of religion in Tibet, as referenced by my fellow panelists. In addition, Chinese officials have recently publicly stated that it will be up to the Communist Party to decide who will be the next Dalai Lama.

While the international community may just laugh off such a ridiculous statement, it is unfortunately a very serious matter. By saying so, Chinese authorities, not only blatantly violate religious freedom, but they are also taking a dangerous road that could lead to instability in Tibet. The Dalai Lama is the spiritual leader of the Tibetan people and continues to be highly revered inside Tibet, despite decades of endless efforts by the Chinese government to tarnish his image and ban any form of public devotion to him. By selecting a Dalai Lama contrary to Tibetan religious traditions, the Chinese government will further exacerbate an already tense situation inside Tibet.

For this reason, ICT calls on the US Congress to publicly request the respect of religious freedom of Tibetans by stating that the Chinese Government should not interfere in the religious sphere of its citizens and in this case, on the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama.

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Internationally, over the last few years the Chinese government has taken a much more aggressive stance on the Tibetan issue. Since 2008, when the economic crisis hit western countries, China has used its economic leverage to put pressure on

governments to stop supporting the Tibetans' quest for the respect for their distinct cultural and religious identity.

The lack of coordinated positions on Tibet among democratic countries has opened the way for China to effectively use a "divide and conquer" strategy to make political gains, especially in Europe. ICT believes that an international group of countries should be convened as soon as possible to adopt a common stance on Tibet that would support the resumption of negotiations and that, in case of continued refusals by China, should explore other options. The U.S. should take a leading role in such an effort. In its most recent report on the status of negotiations between China and the Dalai Lama's envoys, the U.S. Department of State wrote: "The United States believes that a resumption of dialogue and steps to redress Tibetan grievances are critical to reducing the continuing high tensions between Tibetan and Chinese authorities." Now, five years have passed since the last round of negotiations in 2010 between the envoys of the Dalai Lama and the representatives of the Chinese Government, and the time to act has come.

Finally, while it is true that China has made huge financial investments in Tibet over the last two decades, the rhetoric of a happy and thankful Tibetan people loyal to the Chinese Communist Party must be flatly rejected. The Chinese government is not the first in history to claim that citizens do not need freedom or human rights to be happy, but that material development is enough. The Chinese government continues to be authoritarian and its values are at odds with those shared by democratic

countries. The fact that China has become capitalist and that all countries do business with it should not make us forget the realities that ordinary Chinese, Tibetan, and Uyghur people experience every day.

Recommendations for Congress and the Administration:

- Support and pass the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act (HR 1112);
- Continue to press for a US consulate in Lhasa, as provided for in the Tibetan Policy Act of 2002;
- Urge the State department to continue its efforts to promote dialogue between the Chinese government and the Dalai Lama or his representatives, per the Tibetan Policy Act, and to take a leading role in coordinating like-minded countries to shape a common policy on Tibet;
- Support and pass the Global Magnitsky Act, which would hold foreign individuals personally accountable for egregious human rights violations committed in a foreign country;
- Urge the Administration to raise the Tibet issue and cases of Tibetan political prisoners (such as Khenpo Kartse and Tenzin Delek Rinpoche) when meeting with Chinese officials; for example, at the upcoming U.S.-China Strategic & Economic Dialogue, and during Xi Jinping's visit to the U.S. in September.

I thank the Commission again for holding this briefing and look forward to questions and further discussion.