

Remarks  
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*(As Prepared for Delivery)*

Chairman McGovern, Chairman Pitts, and Members of the Commission, thank you for inviting me to testify on United States policy on Tibet, and for your leadership on this issue.

I join you and Secretary Kerry in wishing His Holiness the Dalai Lama a happy birthday, which he celebrated last week.

On a sad note, we were troubled to learn of the death in prison of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche, who had been in ill health and for whom we had sought release on medical parole. Out of respect for the family, we urge Chinese authorities to return his body to his family or to his monastery so that customary rituals can be properly performed.

Today's hearing is just the latest reflection of our country's longtime commitment to Tibet. In 1942, President Roosevelt sent emissaries to a then seven-year old Dalai Lama with a letter that read, "There are in the United States of America many persons, among them myself, who [are] long and greatly interested in your land and people." In September 1987, the forerunner to this Commission – the Congressional Human Rights Caucus under the leadership of Congressmen Tom Lantos and John Porter -- invited His Holiness the Dalai Lama for his first-ever appearance before a parliamentary body. In 1997, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright created the Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues – a position I now have the privilege to hold. Congress codified this role by passing the Tibetan Policy Act in 2002, which remains a fundamental guide for U.S. policy on this issue.

U.S. policy on Tibet aligns closely with the guidance established in the Tibetan Policy Act and reflects bipartisan interest across Administrations and within Congress. Today, I would like to focus my remarks on our efforts to date in four priority areas: (1) the importance of resuming dialogue between the People's Republic of China and the Dalai Lama or his representatives; (2) the challenge of promoting human rights and religious freedom in Tibet; (3) the need to improve diplomatic and public access to Tibet; and (4) the value of preserving Tibet's distinct cultural, religious and linguistic heritage.

As Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues, I have met His Holiness the Dalai Lama three times, and Ogyen Trinley Dorje, the 17th Karmapa, last April. I have met several times with Sikyong Lobsang Sangay, and other senior Department officials have met with leaders of the Central Tibetan Administration, on humanitarian issues. In November 2014, I traveled to Dharamsala,

India, and was able to hear the stories of Tibetan refugees and discuss how U.S. government programming benefits Tibetan communities.

On the first topic, the Obama Administration believes that resuming dialogue between the Chinese government and the Dalai Lama would provide the best hope for alleviating tensions in Tibetan areas and would contribute to the overall stability of China. We are increasingly concerned about the more than five years that have lapsed since the last round of such discussions. When President Obama invited the Dalai Lama to the White House in February 2014, he stressed the benefits of renewed dialogue and expressed support for the Dalai Lama's "Middle Way" approach. Pursuant to the "Middle Way," the Dalai Lama has repeatedly clarified that he does not seek independence for Tibet, but instead wants China to ensure the preservation of Tibet's cultural heritage through genuine autonomy within the People's Republic of China.

While the United States has also consistently voiced respect for Chinese sovereignty, we have repeatedly expressed concern about China's repression of the Tibetan people and culture as well as the horrific self-immolations that reflect the desperation of many Tibetans. To enhance long-term stability within Tibetan areas, we continue to urge the Chinese government to resume direct dialogue, without preconditions, with the Dalai Lama or his representatives.

Second, the United States continues to work to promote Tibetan human rights and religious freedom. Last month, I spoke before more than a dozen delegations on the margins of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland, to highlight the troubling repression of Tibetan human rights. I spoke to our belief that the Tibetan people, like people throughout the world, should be able to enjoy the fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. The fundamental rights of Tibetans, however, remain under assault. The State Department's recently-issued country reports on human rights concluded that China "engaged in the severe repression of Tibet's unique religious, cultural, and linguistic heritage by, among other means, strictly curtailing the civil rights of China's Tibetan population, including the freedoms of speech, religion, association, assembly, and movement."

Specifically, we call for China to end the harassment, detention, and other mistreatment of individuals who seek to peacefully practice their religion, express their views, or seek legal redress. As we hope that the tragic acts of self-immolation end, we also urge Chinese authorities to rescind policies that punish friends, relatives, and associates of self-immolators. We ask for the release of prisoners of conscience, and also request that filmmaker Dhondup Wangchen, who completed his six year prison sentence, be allowed to reunite with his family.

The State Department's annual International Religious Freedom Report highlighted China's growing interference in a core tenet of Tibetan Buddhism: the recognition of reincarnate lamas. In an infamous case, soon after the Dalai Lama recognized the 11th Panchen Lama in 1995, Gedun Choekyi, he was disappeared. The Chinese government has since banned images of him and refuses to respond to inquiries about his whereabouts.

The Dalai Lama has said that it would be inappropriate for the Chinese government to "meddle in the system of reincarnation and especially the reincarnations of the Dalai Lamas and Panchen Lamas." Indeed, the basic and universally recognized right of religious freedom demands that

any decision on the next Dalai Lama be reserved to the current Dalai Lama, Tibetan Buddhist leaders, and the Tibetan people.

We are not alone in our concern for China's intrusive role in Tibetan religious affairs. In March 2015, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief Heiner Bielefeldt criticized China's efforts to control the reincarnation of Tibetan monks, arguing that the Chinese government was "destroying the autonomy of religious communities, poisoning the relationship between different sub-groups, creating schisms, [and] pitching off people against each other in order to exercise control."

Chinese authorities have also taken actions to denigrate the Dalai Lama. This is unfortunate and counterproductive. The spiritual connection between the Dalai Lama and Tibetan Buddhists is beyond measure, and we see his views as widely reflected within Tibetan society. Indeed, this is why the United States believes the Dalai Lama can be a constructive partner for China in addressing current challenges in Tibetan areas.

We have also urged China to respond positively to 12 outstanding requests by the UN Special Rapporteurs for official visits to China, and to honor China's commitment (in the context of its Universal Periodic Review at the Human Rights Council) to allow the High Commissioner Zeid to visit Tibet when he visits China.

Third, the Administration shares the Commission's concern about the lack of physical access to Tibet. The Tibetan plateau's stunning beauty and unique culture are world treasures that all should be able to enjoy. Yet tourists, journalists and foreign diplomats continue to face significant obstacles in visiting Tibetan areas.

Every foreigner who wishes to visit the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) must first obtain a special entry permit from the Chinese authorities. This is not required for travel to any other provincial-level entity in China.

Similarly, as the Foreign Correspondents Club of China notes, all Tibetan areas in China are effectively off-limits to foreign reporters. An opaque and slow-moving visa and credentialing process for foreign journalists, combined with the continued censorship of U.S. media websites, and restrictions on local journalists, significantly restrict freedoms of speech, press and access to information. We have and will continue to urge the Chinese government to address these concerns.

Further, while Chinese diplomats travel freely throughout the United States, our diplomats are not afforded the same access to Tibet. Reciprocity is a cornerstone of diplomatic relations, but over the last four years, Chinese officials have denied 35 of 39 requests made by our Embassy or consulates to visit the TAR. U.S. Ambassador Max Baucus, who visited Lhasa in May 2015, was one of the few U.S. government officials permitted to visit. As Ambassador Baucus noted, improved access by U.S. diplomats is a prerequisite for greater cooperation on clean energy development, safeguarding the environment and wetlands, and expanded American investment and tourism in Tibet.

Restricted access to Tibet for U.S. officials frustrates our ability to provide vital services to U.S. citizens. In October 2013, the Chinese government delayed consular access for more than 48 hours to the site of a bus accident involving U.S. citizens, which undermined our ability to provide consular services to the victims and their families. Three U.S. citizens died and multiple others sustained serious injuries. China has fallen short of its obligations under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations. We have urged China to fulfill its obligations.

The United States continues to seek China's agreement to establish a U.S. consulate in Lhasa. When the Chinese government in 2008 requested that it be allowed to establish consulates general in Atlanta, Georgia, and Boston, Massachusetts, we requested permission to establish an office in Lhasa, Tibet, as well as in other locations in China. A presence in Lhasa would help us provide essential services to U.S. citizens in the western part of the People's Republic of China. The Chinese government has yet to respond to the Department's request.

Lastly, and in partnership with Congress, the Administration works to preserve Tibetans' distinct cultural, religious, and linguistic heritage. Tibetans have an inalienable right to be stewards of their unique cultural, religious and linguistic heritage. They have a right to do so without interference and in peace and dignity.

The U.S. government has many programs that assist Tibetan communities in China, India, and Nepal to preserve their cultural traditions, support sustainable economic development, strengthen environmental conservation, and provide protection, healthcare, and education. My office works in close coordination with the offices that implement these programs, including the Department's Bureaus of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM); Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA); and Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL), and by USAID.

For example, the State Department's Tibetan Scholarship Program, overseen by ECA, enables Tibetan refugees to pursue graduate level education in the U.S. so they can develop leadership skills and serve their communities when they return. In another example, one of USAID's grantees, the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center, helps local Tibetans to archive digitally more than 2.5 million pages of Tibetan texts to preserve their cultural significance for future generations.

I saw the impact of these and other programs first-hand in my trip to Dharamsala. I met with recently arrived Tibetan refugees who were studying at a school for adult-learners funded by PRM. The school empowers these recent arrivals to become more self-reliant and productive members of the community by providing them with foundational language, math, and vocational skills.

As Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues, I will continue focusing on these four priority areas. A key element of my work is engaging with like-minded foreign partners that share our interest in helping Tibetans preserve their culture and dignity. During my travels in Europe and Asia, several foreign governments have reaffirmed their interest in Tibet and the Dalai Lama, and their support for Chinese negotiations, greater access to Tibetan areas, and other issues of common concern. I have been heartened by the enduring international concern about Tibetans' freedoms and future.

As an example, on June 29, European Council President Donald Tusk stated that during the EU-China Summit that day he encouraged China to resume a meaningful dialogue with the Dalai Lama's representatives. Over the years, Canada, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Iceland, Japan, New Zealand, Poland, Switzerland and the United Kingdom are among the countries in addition to the United States that have urged China at the Human Rights Council to uphold its international obligations to protect Tibetans' fundamental human rights.

For our part, the Obama Administration will continue to raise our concerns about these troubling trends in Tibet, as we did at the Strategic and Economic Dialogue last month, as we will at the upcoming U.S.-China Human Rights Dialogue, and as we continue to do at the UN Human Rights Council and in other fora.

I look forward to working with the Commission on these issues and to help the Tibetan people shape a better future. I applaud the Commission for its continued interest in Tibetan human rights and I welcome your questions. Thank you.

*Available on-line: <http://www.state.gov/j/remarks/244911.htm#>*