



## Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing

### Tibet & China: Searching for a New Way Forward

Tuesday, July 14, 2015  
1:30 pm – 3:30 pm  
HVC-210 U.S. Capitol Visitor Center

#### **Opening Remarks of Rep. James P. McGovern**

Good afternoon, and thank you for attending today's hearing, *Tibet & China: Searching for a New Way Forward*. I would like to welcome our distinguished witnesses who are leading efforts on behalf of the U.S. government and civil society to promote respect for the human rights of Tibetans. I would also like to thank the staff of the Commission for organizing this important hearing.

Yesterday I began the day with the news of the tragic and unnecessary death of the revered Tibetan monk Tenzin Delek Rinpoche in a Chinese prison. Tenzin Delek was in the thirteenth year of a twenty-year sentence for allegedly “causing explosions” and “inciting separatism,” charges against which he steadfastly maintained his innocence. He was serving his sentence under very harsh conditions. According to reports, his family was allowed only one visit in 13 years; and although he was said to suffer from a heart condition, bouts of unconsciousness and uncontrollable shaking of parts of his body, it's not clear whether he received any medical treatment in prison.

As recently as April, I urged the State Department to prioritize his release on medical parole in our engagement with China, and just two weeks ago I was assured that message had been delivered. Yet here we are, with another Tibetan leader dead.

All of us are present today because we care about the fundamental rights of Tibetans, including the right to worship as they choose and to enjoy and protect their culture. But the situation in Tibet is dire, and we may be running out of time to guarantee those rights.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has been in exile for 56 years. As we celebrate his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, the Chinese government has recently asserted its right to approve his successor. The very continuation of the ancient line of Tibetan spiritual leadership and reincarnation is in question.

Since 2009, more than 130 Tibetans inside China have taken the unimaginable step of setting themselves on fire – at least 112 are believed to have died. Some chose self-immolation to protest Chinese government policies, others to call for the return of the Dalai Lama. In response, Chinese authorities have intensified official reprisals.

In April, the Chinese government issued a new white paper on Tibet, with its own version of history and an unprecedented demand that the Dalai Lama publicly state that Tibet has been an integral part of China since antiquity, as a pre-condition for improving relations with China.

Congress has taken action on behalf of Tibet in the past. We approved the Tibetan Policy Act of 2002, which is supposed to guide U.S. government policy -- it encourages dialogue between the Chinese government and representatives of the Dalai Lama, and created the post of Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues within the Department of State. Just last week the House approved H. Res. 337, calling for substantive dialogue, without preconditions, in order to address Tibetan grievances and secure a negotiated agreement for the Tibetan people.

But I get the sense that China doesn't take us seriously. On the dialogue front, China and Tibet held nine rounds of talks between 2002 and 2010 but reached no agreements. No talks have been held since 2010. Were there any consequences to the Chinese for its intransigence and the breakdown of the talks?

Then there's the issue of access to Tibetan territory. The Chinese government does not grant the U.S. the same access to the People's Republic that we grant China – and it imposes even greater restrictions on access to Tibet. As our first witness Under Secretary Sarah Sewall reported in her comments in Geneva last month, over the last four years, 35 of 39 requests made by the U.S. Embassy or U.S. Consulates to visit the Tibet Autonomous Region were denied. Again, what are the consequences to the Chinese for this behavior? Are there any consequences whatsoever?

At the risk of sounding “un-Dalai-Lama-like” – I am angry and frustrated. I am outraged by the Chinese government's treatment of the Tibetan people. To be blunt – it is unconscionable.

We need to be doing something different. We need to have the guts to take some action. Everyone in the world says how much he or she admires the Dalai Lama. Every head of state, every international organization – all declare how much they care about Tibet and worry about

abuses against the Tibetan people. But nothing changes. We must all come together now to change the status quo, to change the game the Chinese government has been playing for so many decades. The situation is urgent – it can wait no longer. And shame on us if we stand by, with empty words, and continue to watch the people of Tibet suffer, and their culture, religion and way of life be exterminated, day by day, year by year, until nothing is left.

To the People's Republic of China, I have one more message. Perhaps you think that with the eventual inevitable death of His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, the issue of Tibetan human rights will die, too. But that would be a wrong calculation. We in the U.S. Congress will not forget Tibet, nor will the millions of others around the world who take their inspiration from the Tibetan way of life. You would be well-advised to reach an agreement with the Dalai Lama while you still can. The future without him is unclear. Today, all around the world, we are seeing the consequences of the repression of religious and ethnic minorities. There is still time to recognize that inclusion and respect for human rights offer the best path to security.

Before I turn to my other House colleagues, I ask that we now observe a moment of silence to remember and honor the life of Tenzin Delek.