

March 11, 2009

Yesterday marked the passage of 50 years since the Tibetan people in Lhasa first rose in protest against the harsh actions of the People's Republic of China to undermine the Tibetan self-government. I am honored to introduce this resolution recognizing the long hardship borne by the Tibetan people, a great people, who continue to labor peacefully for freedom in Tibet and maintain a Tibetan cultural identity and democratic community, even in exile. Importantly, this resolution also recognizes the government and the people of India, who generously have hosted the exiled government and people of Tibet in the city of Dharamsala since 1960. The perseverance and charity exhibited by these peoples should be a model for all.

For 50 years the situation in Tibet has deteriorated with too little attention from the outside world. Tibetan culture has been eradicated systematically and relentlessly. Basic freedoms, like freedoms of speech and religion and association and movement, have been repressed. Human rights abuses have been all too common and continue to occur. At this time last year, the Chinese Government was engaged in a fierce crackdown on nonviolent Tibetan protesters that resulted in serious injuries to civilians and an undetermined but significant number of deaths. Even today reports indicate that the Chinese Government has imposed a virtual state of martial law in the Tibetan plateau.

Over the same 50 years and in the face of such adversity, the Dalai Lama has sought to bring wisdom to human affairs and has used his position and leadership to promote compassion and nonviolence in the search for a lasting solution to this issue.

Last year I had the opportunity to travel to India with a congressional delegation led by Speaker *Pelosi*

. We witnessed firsthand the dedicated Tibetans who crossed the rugged Himalayas to escape oppression, including young children. We also had lengthy meetings with the Dalai Lama, whose commitment to peaceful, steady progress is a powerful beacon of hope to all people seeking freedom and equality. It is long past time for this commitment to be reciprocated by the Chinese Government.

The so-called "Seventeen Point Agreement" that was signed by Chinese authorities in 1951 provided that "the central authorities will not alter the existing political system in Tibet. The central authorities also will not alter the established status, functions, and powers of the Dalai Lama. Officials of various ranks shall hold office as usual." A few years later, in March of 1959, just days after the Dalai Lama's flight from Lhasa, the Chinese Government abolished the local Tibetan governing structure. The agreement also explicitly stated that "when the people raise

demands for reform, they must be settled through consultation with the leading personnel of Tibet." Clearly the terms of this agreement have not been upheld. Tibetans and the international community are asking that the Chinese Government implement autonomy as promised but never granted genuinely.

In this spirit the resolution before us calls for an immediate cessation of the repression and abuses being imposed upon the people of Tibet. We urge the Chinese Government to engage in a constructive dialogue with the Dalai Lama in a sustained effort to craft a permanent and just solution that protects the rights and dignity of all Tibetans. The distinctive culture of Tibet must be preserved, and we throughout the world should want it preserved, and a vibrant future must be guaranteed. I'm hopeful that the new administration will answer the call of this resolution to use all of the diplomatic, programmatic, and multilateral tools at its disposal to encourage China to adopt such a course.

Last year this body agreed to a resolution introduced by Speaker *Pelosi* that addressed the rights of the Tibetan people. Today we reiterate that message and recommit ourselves to a sustained effort. Today is a day when this body once again brings a national spotlight to the plight of the Tibetan people, honors those who struggle nonviolently against brutal suppression, and reaffirms our commitment to freedom around the world. It is a day when we recognize, in the words of the Dalai Lama, "the importance of universal responsibility, nonviolence, and interreligious understanding."

I would like to thank Chairman *Berman* and the House Foreign Affairs Committee for their leadership and action on this issue. I appreciate the support of Ranking Member

Ros-Lehtinen

and the hard work of Mr. Halpin of the minority staff as well as Mr. Hans Hogrefe of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission. The immense contributions of Todd Stein and the International Campaign for Tibet should also be acknowledged. And I would like to pay special tribute to Speaker

Pelosi

, who has long been a strong champion of human rights in Tibet and around the world, and to thank her for her help with this resolution.

We call on the leaders of China for justice and freedom.