

Testimony of  
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before the  
House Committee on Foreign Affairs hearing on the  
Congressional-Executive Commission on China: 2011 Annual Report

November 3, 2011

Madam Chairman, Congressman Berman, and Members of the Committee. I thank you for this opportunity to testify on the Tibet aspects of the annual report of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC).

This hearing comes at a critical juncture in the modern history of Tibet. Tibetans in unprecedented numbers have started resorting in their despair – and some would say in their extraordinary courage and conviction – to the most extreme form of protest imaginable: self-immolation.

We value the work of the CECC and commend the annual report not only for the rigor of its reporting, but also for the breadth of its scope. The CECC provides a valuable service in covering a wide spectrum of human rights abuses committed by Chinese authorities in Tibet: from threats to the Tibetan language to political imprisonment; from the steady eradication of the Tibetan nomadic lifestyle to regulations to exert control over Tibetan Buddhism; from harassing, detaining and imprisoning writers to jailing Tibetans who came to the aid of monks who had burned themselves. I would like to comment on the CECC report by linking it to what is happening with Tibetans in Tibet today.

On October 25, Dawa Tsering, a monk in his thirties from Kardze Monastery in Eastern Tibet (Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture), set fire to himself, thus becoming the 11th Tibetan to have self-immolated since March 2009, and the tenth since March of this year. All but two of these were from the Kirti Monastery in Ngaba, a Tibetan region in Eastern Tibet.

Why are these young Tibetans resorting to such grave actions? And why are they mostly clustered around Kirti Monastery? To find possible reasons for these ongoing tragic developments, I recently spent some time looking through reports from the area around Ngaba over the past year.

Simply put, much of the answers can be found in the latest annual report of the CECC. The report says, “During the past year, the Chinese government and Communist Party continued the campaign to discredit the Dalai Lama as a religious leader and expanded government and Party control over Tibetan Buddhism to impose what officials describe as the “normal order” of the religion.” Similarly, the report highlights the fact that 9 of 10 Tibetan autonomous prefectural governments issued or drafted regulatory measures that increase substantially state infringement of freedom of religion in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and nunneries. These are clearly the basis for Tibetan grievances.

On top of these religious restrictions, Ngaba has been subject to a severe security crackdown since the pan-Tibetan demonstrations in March 2008. That same month, a 16-year-old schoolgirl,

Lhundup Tso, was shot dead when Chinese police opened fire on unarmed Tibetans who had joined a protest following a prayer session at Kirti monastery. Following the recent acts of self-immolation, the crackdown has only intensified, as evidenced by a recent secret video taken by foreign journalists, which showed a smothering armed security presence on the main street of Ngaba.

Although the recent developments have drawn our attention to eastern Tibetan areas, the fact is that all over Tibet the Tibetan people are experiencing a tense atmosphere. A climate of fear pervades in all Tibetan areas on account of misguided policies of the Chinese government. These policies are well documented by the CECC report and are consistent with research done by the International Campaign for Tibet.

The CECC report also clearly highlights another factor for Tibetan grievances, namely China's insistence on wholly dominating all aspects of Tibetan culture and identity, and the lack of any positive outcome on negotiations with the envoys of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

The timing of today's hearing is propitious. At 2:00 this afternoon, the elected head of the Central Tibetan Administration in Dharamsala, India, Dr. Lobsang Sangay, will be testifying before the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission. Since the Dalai Lama relinquished his political role in the Tibetan government in exile, the Kalon Tripa, as Dr. Sangay's position is called, has assumed a more important role. I urge members and all of you to attend this afternoon's hearing. Also testifying at the hearing is Kirti Rinpoche, the spiritual head of the Kirti Monastic community, who will speak to the conditions in which these tragic acts of self-immolation have occurred.

As Members of Congress consider policy toward China and Tibet, the International Campaign for Tibet lends its support to the recommendations on Tibet contained in the CECC's report. I would like to highlight the recommendation calling for "increased support for U.S. non-governmental organizations to develop programs that can assist Tibetans to increase their capacity" in the areas of cultural preservation, environmental protection and sustainable development. The U.S. Agency for International Development currently operates a small but effective grant program that aids marginalized communities on the Tibetan plateau, operated by The Bridge Fund and other groups. Continued Congressional support for this valuable initiative is needed and appreciated.

In addition, we would like to offer some select policy recommendations to the Committee:

**1. Update and strengthen the Tibetan Policy Act.**

The Tibetan Policy Act of 2002 is a comprehensive and pragmatic expression of Congressional support for the Tibetan people. We urge the Committee to explore further ways to strengthen the Act to take into account new developments in Tibetan politics. The Tibetan exile community, under the wisdom of the Dalai Lama, has fully developed democratic self-governance. Given the pro-democracy upheavals in the Middle East and North Africa, and the intensive reaction of the Chinese government to suppress anything similar at home, U.S. policy-makers should reflect on the Tibetans' democratic achievement, assess what it means for change inside China, and consider enhancing its relationship with the Central Tibetan Administration.

Moreover, given the Congress' long-standing promotion of international religious freedom, the Committee should explore whether the Tibetan Policy Act can be used to clarify U.S. policy on the succession or reincarnation of the next Dalai Lama, for which the officially atheist Chinese government is attempting to claim exclusive authority.

Lastly, the Tibetan Policy Act can be updated to include legislative authorization and policy guidance for assistance for Tibetan refugee settlements in the Indian subcontinent, much as the Act already provides policy principles for support of development projects in Tibet.

The Committee has already taken a positive step in this direction. In June of this year, the Committee held an oversight hearing on the Tibetan Policy Act of 2002; I refer you to the testimony of ICT's Chairman of the Board, Richard Gere, for several recommendations. Subsequently, the Committee approved H.R. 2583, the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, which contained several amendments to the Tibetan Policy Act, including a measure to authorize a U.S. consulate in Lhasa, Tibet.

## **2. Promotion of the Tibetan-Chinese Dialogue.**

The Congress should continue to send the strong message to China that it supports His Holiness the Dalai Lama's initiative for a solution to the Tibetan issue through dialogue with the Chinese leadership. On October 12, 2011, Dr. Lobsang Sangay issued a statement in which he reiterated his "firm commitment in finding a mutually acceptable solution in the spirit of the Middle-Way Approach." He further said, "I have therefore asked the two envoys of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to make efforts to resume the dialogue at the earliest convenience." Since January 2010 there have not been another round of dialogue between the two sides.

Similarly, it has been four and half years since the US Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues has testified to Congress on the state of the dialogue between the Chinese government and the envoys of the Dalai Lama. Special Coordinator and Under Secretary of State Maria Otero should be invited to offer the U.S. government's position, along with Special Envoy of His Holiness the Dalai Lama Lodi Gyari to offer his perspective, as has been done in the past.

Such a hearing would also provide the Committee with the opportunity to conduct oversight of the Special Coordinator's office, including whether it has sufficient resources and staff to carry out the responsibilities as laid out in the Tibetan Policy Act.

## **3. Restrictions on Chinese delegations from or about Tibet.**

The State Department reports that three-quarters of diplomats' requests to visit Tibetan areas are denied, and all foreign visitors are required to get a special permit to visit the Tibet Autonomous Region. Here in the United States, Tibetan Americans are subjected to a racially discriminatory process when they apply for visas at the Chinese Embassy and consulates and even then many do not get permission to visit Tibet. However, China is freely able to send delegations to the United States to denounce His Holiness the Dalai Lama and to spread its propaganda about Tibet. The Congress should look for ways to impose restrictions in a situation where the Chinese government is not respecting the diplomatic principle of reciprocity. As an example, the State Department could be asked to deny visas to relevant officials until authorities provide a full accounting of the forcible removal of monks from Kirti monastery, including an explanation of the pretext or conditions under which monks were removed and their current whereabouts.

In conclusion, I once again appreciate the opportunity to testify today and welcome the Committee's examination of the human rights in China and Tibet through its oversight of the CECC annual report.

United States House of Representatives  
Committee on Foreign Affairs

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Clause 2(g) of rule XI of the Rules of the House of Representatives and the Rules of the Committee require the disclosure of the following information. A copy of this form should be attached to your written testimony and will be made publicly available in electronic format, per House Rules.

<b>1. Name:</b>  Bhuchung K Tsering	<b>2. Organization or organizations you are representing:</b>  International Campaign for Tibet
<b>3. Date of Committee hearing:</b>  November 3, 2011	
<b>4. Have <u>you</u> received any Federal grants or contracts (including any subgrants and subcontracts) since October 1, 2008 related to the subject on which you have been invited to testify?</b>  <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	<b>5. Have any of the <u>organizations you are representing</u> received any Federal grants or contracts (including any subgrants and subcontracts) since October 1, 2008 related to the subject on which you have been invited to testify?</b>  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<b>6. If you answered yes to either item 4 or 5, please list the source and amount of each grant or contract, and indicate whether the recipient of such grant was you or the organization(s) you are representing. You may list additional grants or contracts on additional sheets.</b>     National Endowment for Democracy for ICT: \$50,000 a year in 2009, 2010 and 2011.	
<b>7. Signature:</b>  	

*Please attach a copy of this form to your written testimony.*