



**Testimony of Kalon Dicki Chhoyang of the Central Tibetan Administration
before the Italian Senate's Extraordinary Commission
for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights**

Rome - 5 December 2013

President Senator Luigi Manconi, Commission members, I thank you for this opportunity to testify before the Senate's Committee for the Protection of Human Rights on behalf of the Tibetan people.

Tibet's association with Italy dates back to 1716, when Tuscan Jesuit Ippolito Desideri arrived in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet. He was the first European to have successfully studied Tibetan language and culture. This connection endures to this day with Italy providing a second home to Tibetans who have sought political refuge. Many Italian cities and towns including the great City of Rome have also honored His Holiness the Dalai Lama as an honorary citizen.

In expression of support, the Italian Chamber of Deputies unanimously adopted a resolution on 8 February 2009 calling on the People's Republic of China to engage in dialogue with His Holiness the Dalai Lama's Envoys to resolve the Tibet issue. It also called for an immediate end to repression in Tibet and on the Italian Government to promote a monitoring initiative on human rights violations in Tibet at the United Nations. Similarly, the Italian Chamber of Deputies' Committee for Foreign Affairs passed a resolution on 8 February 2012, reiterating the above recommendations to the Italian government. We thank you for these gestures of solidarity.

Today, I come to you to report on the state of Tibet – the daily struggles of Tibetans inside Tibet trying to maintain their dignity under the iron fist of repression, and the continuing efforts of those of us living in freedom, working to preserve Tibetan culture in exile until we can return home. I am proud to say that the Tibetan spirit is strong. Through the visionary leadership of His Holiness the Dalai Lama for all these years, our issue remains alive, our hopes remain buoyant. The rule imposed on us by Beijing may be tough, but the Tibetan people are tougher still.

As you know, in 2011, His Holiness the Dalai Lama took a historical decision and devolved his political responsibilities to the elected leadership of the Central Tibetan Administration. This decision was the critical final step in the realization of his vision of a democratic governance institution for the Tibetan people. Further, this achievement sends a clear message to Beijing that leadership of the Tibet freedom movement has been entrusted to a younger generation. China is calculating that the Tibetan cause will fade when the current Dalai Lama passes away. This will not happen. We remain determined to finding a peaceful resolution to the situation in Tibet through the Middle Way Approach which seeks genuine autonomy within the framework of China's constitution.

In 1950, when the Chinese People's Liberation Army came to Tibet, they promised Tibetans a 'socialist paradise.' After more than 60 years of misrule in Tibet, there is no socialism, just colonialism; there is no paradise, only tragedy. News from our homeland is replete with tales of destruction including Tibetan language and environment, disappearances, discrimination, detention, imprisonment, torture and extrajudicial killing. The current number of known political prisoners in Tibet today is estimated to be as high 1,204. This year alone over 254 Tibetans were imprisoned. 22 Tibetans have been sentenced to life imprisonment since 2008.

Political repression, cultural assimilation, economic marginalization and environmental destruction continue in occupied Tibet. The new railway line from Beijing to Lhasa is exporting our natural resources and importing more Chinese migrants. Today, around 70 percent of private-sector firms in Tibet are owned or run by Chinese, and more than 50 percent of government officials are Chinese. Yet, approximately 40 percent of Tibetans with university and high school degrees are unemployed.

A simple example of this is the clandestine photo of a help-wanted sign from a shop in Lhasa a couple years ago. The sign offered two different pay scale, 30 Renminbi for Tibetans and 50 Renminbi for Chinese, a blatant case of economic discrimination. Tibetans have been made second-class citizens in their own land.

Education -- In matters of education, we are extremely concerned about the substitution of Tibetan with Mandarin as a medium of instruction in Tibet. Language is the most important attribute of a people's identity. Tibetan is the primary means of communication, the language in which our literature, our spiritual texts and historical as well as scientific works are written. The implementation of this new educational policy has resulted in large Tibetan student protests calling for the Chinese government to live by its motto "equality of nationalities" through equality of language.

Religious freedom -- Buddhism is a way of life for the Tibetans and is closely linked to our identity. The suppression of freedom of religious belief and practice takes several forms including the Chinese Communist Party running monasteries through so-called "management committees". "Patriotic re-education" sessions during which monks/nuns are forced to denounce His Holiness the Dalai Lama and pledge allegiance to the Party have become the daily routine - this has been one of the key triggers for the wave of self-immolations.

Tibet's environment and nomad settlement -- Tibet sits between two of the largest countries in the world, and at a crossroads that connects China to South and Central Asia. The Tibetan plateau has some of the largest deposits of fresh water outside the two poles. It is the source of many of the Asia's major rivers, including the Brahmaputra, Indus, Sutlej, Salween, Mekong, Yangtze and Yellow River, these rivers flow into China, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. These river systems and their tributaries sustain the lives of millions of people in the Asian continent.

For millennia, the Tibetan people have served as the guardians of the plateau, its rivers and environment. China's policies, however, are creating potential disasters. For one, they are forcibly removing Tibetan nomads, the land's traditional stewards, from the grasslands, while at the same time promoting mining and deforesting.

According to UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Mr. Olivier De Schutter's report dated 20 January 2012, stating Chinese sources, that in the Tibet Autonomous Region, the Chinese government

has provided “comfortable housing” for 1.43 million people (300,000 families), as targeted in its 2006-2010 Five-Year Plan, and announced that another 185,500 families (about 880,000 people) are expected to move into new homes by 2013 as part of the continuation of its sedentarization and rehousing of the Tibetan rural population. The authorities in Qinghai province reported in March 2011 that they had built 46,000 settlements between 2009 and 2010, and planned to build 25,000 more for 134,000 families.

A chief aspect of the policy regarding herder communities, and one that upsets many Tibetans is its impact on Tibetan culture. Another concern is that without adequate long-term planning as to how they will subsist after being made to abandon their traditional way of life, the negative social impact in these communities is beginning to be felt with rising incidence of crime and alcoholism.

Once vacated by nomads, Tibetan land is open for exploitation by Chinese companies. Tibet is rich in natural resources, including gold, copper and water (for hydro-electric power). Mining companies and damming operations have replaced farmers in many areas. Tibetans are protesting against the consequences of these environmentally damaging projects which are being implemented without proper local consultation and environmental/social impact assessment.

Changes in Tibet’s ecology could have negative effects far beyond the plateau. Temperatures are rising faster on the plateau than the global average. Glaciers are melting. Water flows and monsoon patterns are more variable. At the same time, China is undertaking massive dam construction on these major rivers. Additional projects to divert waters to China’s drought-ridden areas could have major consequences for downstream nations like India, Bangladesh, Cambodia and Laos whose livelihood depends on rivers that flow from Tibet.

Another important threat is the massive influx of Han Chinese into the Tibetan areas. The demographic transfer has marginalized and assimilated the Tibetan people in their own homeland. This has not only adversely affected the socio-economic conditions of Tibetan people, but it has also disrupted the fragile ecological balance on the roof of the world.

Self-Immolations

Just 2 days ago, on 3 December, another self-immolation took place in Meruma town in Ngaba, Eastern Tibet. Since February 2009, 123 Tibetans have committed self-immolation in Tibet. Sadly, 105 have died. Such form of political protest is unprecedented in Tibetan history. This number includes Tibetans from all walks of life - men, women, monks, nuns, nomads, farmers and students. They include Tibetans from all regions of Tibet U-Tsang, Kham and Amdo including the capital city of Lhasa. Their universal aspirations are His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s return to Tibet and freedom for Tibetan people. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has visited Italy over 25 times since 1973. During these visits, thousands of Italians have met and heard His Holiness the Dalai Lama. But, that right is denied to Tibetans inside Tibet.

The Central Tibetan Administration does not support or encourage self-immolations. His Holiness the Dalai Lama's position has also been clear and consistent on any form of drastic action. He has always appealed to the Tibetans not to resort to such desperate acts. As Buddhists, we consider life sacred, yet in the absence of conventional space for protest, Tibetans are left with few options to send an unequivocal message to the world that Chinese policies in Tibet are clearly failing. The Tibetan Administration feels a moral responsibility to speak on their behalf so that the world may understand their actions.

Rather than looking into the root causes behind the self-immolations, the Chinese authorities have criminalized the self-immolators and resorted to the blame game by accusing His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan exile community as instigators. This has gone as far as preventing families of the self-immolators from holding proper traditional funeral rites for the latter. The Tibetan Administration has invited the Chinese government to come to Dharamsala and visit our offices for any evidence supporting their baseless allegations.

In reality, both the blame and solution lies with Beijing. The self-immolations result from decades of Chinese misrule in Tibet. The self-immolations are Tibetan people's protest against misguided policies. Beijing has the power to change the situation on the ground by reviewing its policies in Tibet to reflect the wishes of the people and responding peacefully to civil expression of discontent. Here are a few examples to illustrate the current situation:

In the past year, the Ngaba Court sentenced to death, without due process, two Tibetans accused of involvement with a self-immolation incident - Lobsang Kunchok on 31 January 2013 and Dolma Kyab on 15 August 2013.

On 24 June 2012, a 17-year-old girl, Jigme Dolma protested in Kardze county center in Eastern Tibet. She called out for the return of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, freedom for Tibetans, and Tibetan political prisoners release. The Chinese security forces beat her. She was hospitalized for two months. Then, she was sentenced to three years imprisonment.

On 6 July 2013, the indiscriminate firing upon Tibetans by Chinese security forces with 11 Tibetans being shot upon and 16 beaten for celebrating His Holiness the Dalai Lama's birthday in Tawu, Eastern Tibet.

On 3 September 2013, Dayang a 68-year-old Tibetan man was sentenced to two years and five months imprisonment. He had called for His Holiness the Dalai Lama's return and freedom for Tibetans during a cultural show in Tsachu Township in Driru County, Nagchu in Central Tibet.

On 28 September 2013, in the run up to the Universal Periodic Review of China at the UN Human Rights Council, the Chinese security forces cracked down heavily on local Tibetans in Mowa Village in Driru County (Central Tibet) refusing to raise the Chinese national flags on their rooftops. The Chinese authorities detained a total of 17 Tibetans.

A few days later, on 6 October 2013, again in Driru County, the Chinese security forces are said to have shot and wounded at least 60 Tibetans who were demanding the release of a villager who had led protests against Chinese orders to hoist the flag. Two days later, the Chinese security forces shot dead four Tibetans. At least 50 were injured on October 8. The stand-off continues to this day.

Middle Way Approach

I would like to conclude today's statement by re-iterating Tibetan people's firm commitment to non-violence and dialogue. We do not view the Chinese nation and people with malice, but with respect. Tibetans with their distinct culture have lived alongside our Chinese brothers and sisters for thousands of years. The Central Tibetan Administration strives for a resolution to the situation inside Tibet through the Middle Way Approach which seeks genuine autonomy within the framework of the Chinese constitution. We have formulated this vision through two documents: the "Memorandum on

Genuine Autonomy For the Tibetan People” and “Note on the Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan People.” Both documents were presented to the Chinese government in 2008 and 2010 respectively. The documents outlines "11 basic needs" for which Tibetans wish genuine autonomy: 1) Language, 2) Culture, 3) Religion, 4) Education, 5) Environment Protection, 6) Utilisation of Natural Resources, 7) Economic Development and Trade, 8) Public Health, 9) Public Security, 10) Regulation on population migration and 11) Cultural, educational and religious exchanges with other countries.

We see in the new Chinese leadership of President Xi Jinping, an opportunity for countries like Italy, with extensive experience with regional autonomy, to engage with China and share its successful experience.

Tibetans have subscribed to non-violence and democracy for these many decades as a reflection of our deeply-held beliefs and value system. As governments and the international community constantly speak of peaceful conflict resolution, the strength of those convictions is being tested when the moment comes to publicly support steadfast non-violent political movements such as Tibet. It is mistaken to believe one's government must choose between Tibet and China. A true friend of China will understand that the resolution of the Tibet question has become one of China's key barometer as a mature peaceful global power.

We seek the support from friends like you who believe in freedom, who believe in democracy, that the Chinese government ought to enter into dialogue to solve the issue of Tibet peacefully.

Finally, we request the Italian Senate to recommend to the Italian Government to request the following to the Chinese government to

- Engage in dialogue with His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s Envoys to resolve the Tibet issue on the Middle Way Approach, which seeks genuine autonomy within the framework of the Chinese Constitution.
- Immediate end to repression in Tibet
- Guarantee the use of Tibetan as a medium of instruction in Tibetan areas
- Suspend the forceful settlement of Tibetan nomads

And request the Italian Government to

Engage with the Chinese government on the issue of regional autonomy

I express once again our appreciation to the members of the Italian Senate who are here today and who have been long-term friends of Tibet and its people. I urge you at this critical time to help us realize the aspirations of the Tibetan people. As we see justice prevail in different parts of the world, so it should be for Tibet with your support.

Thank you

5 December 2013