

Testimony of Bhuchung K. Tsering  
Vice President for Special Programs  
International Campaign for Tibet  
Washington, D.C.

At a hearing of the  
House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
on Investigating the Chinese Threat, Part Two:  
Human Rights Abuses, Torture and Disappearances  
July 25, 2012

Madam Chairman and Members of the Committee. I thank you for yet another opportunity to testify on the situation in Tibet, with particular reference to the issues of human rights abuses, torture and disappearances, as the Committee works to investigate into the Chinese threat.

It is the aspiration of the present leadership of the People's Republic of China (PRC) to project their country as an emerging super power, if not already one, that will abide by "universally-accepted norms." Towards that end, they have even advocated their relations with the United States as "a new-type relationship between major countries" which features "cooperation not confrontation, win-win results not 'zero-sum' game, and healthy competition not malicious rivalry."

I would like to raise the following matters relating to China's attitude towards Tibetans in the framework of whether China is living up to universally-accepted norms. As the hearing is focused on threats, I offer the following:

- A consistent pattern of China's violation of Tibetans' rights as a context for, and a response to, the successive self-immolations in Tibet;
- The threat to stability within the PRC due to its failure to negotiate a solution to the Tibet problem and address Tibetans' underlying grievances;
- The refusal of the PRC to cooperate on threats to international peace and security (read: Syria) due to its 'non-interference doctrine' and sensitivity over the legitimacy of its control over Tibet;
- China's interference in Nepal's internal affairs and its increasingly blatant pressure on Nepalese officials to clamp down on Tibetans in Nepal;
- The threat of Chinese soft power – specifically, the use of Confucius Institutes to spread propaganda and shut down academic discourse on Tibet; and
- The possibility of regional conflict over water if Tibet's rivers are dammed and/or diverted by the Chinese absent any regional framework on water resources.

### **Background: Self-Immolations and Aftermath**

With the most recent self-immolation on July 17, 2012, there have been 44 Tibetans confirmed to have self-immolated in different Tibetan areas since February 27, 2009.

Out of the 44 Tibetans, 33 are confirmed to have died and 11 are either missing or said to be “hospitalized.”

Madam Chairman, I would ask consent that the names and details of all the Tibetans who have committed self-immolations in Tibet since 2009 be included in the record.

A common demand of self-immolators has been the Dalai Lama’s return to Tibet and freedom for the Tibetan people. They are challenging political, cultural, religious and social injustices, the roots of which are not being acknowledged and addressed by the Chinese authorities.

Instead of addressing the genuine grievances of the Tibetan people, the Chinese authorities have responded to the self-immolations by increasing restrictions, torturing members of the self-immolators’ family or their acquaintances and taking several into custody without any judicial process. These stringent restrictions will only increase the sense of injustice and discrimination felt by Tibetans. As long as Tibetans continue to be denied the opportunity to live a life of equality, respect and dignity, it is clear that they will undertake actions to convey their feelings.

Chinese officials have also sought to deflect blame by humiliating the Tibetans, declaring the self-immolators to be criminals and saying their actions were instigated by ‘the Dalai clique.’ They also attempted to minimize the political significance of these actions.

### **China’s consistent violations of Tibetans’ rights**

Successive Administrations have highlighted the plight of the Tibetan people and have raised the issue with Chinese officials at various fora, including in the US-China Human Rights Dialogue, which just concluded yesterday. We welcome such initiatives as they reflect the concern of the American public about the situation in Tibet.

The International Campaign for Tibet, however, believes that the State Department bears the burden of proving that these dialogues are more than ritualized exercises that enable smooth U.S.-China relations. The U.S. side should be clear about what improvements the Chinese should deliver in Tibet, and what the response will be if they do not.

The State Department in its annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, issued in May 2012, described the situation in Tibet as follows: “There was severe repression of freedoms of speech, religion, association, and movement. Authorities continued to commit serious human rights abuses, including extrajudicial torture, arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial detention, and house arrests. The preservation and development of Tibet’s unique religious, cultural, and linguistic heritage and unique high plateau environment remained a concern.”

The top Administration official responsible for Tibet, Under Secretary Maria Otero, in a statement on January 24 as the United States Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues said, “I am gravely concerned by reports of violence and continuing heightened tensions in

Tibetan areas of China, including reports of security forces in Sichuan province opening fire on protestors, killing some and injuring others.”

In April, the International Campaign for Tibet released a major report entitled “60 Years of Misrule; Arguing Cultural Genocide in Tibet,” which finds that Chinese authorities have engaged in a consistent and systemic effort to replace organic Tibetan culture with a state-approved version to suit the Party’s ideological, political and economic objectives. It argues that these policies are so systematic and persistent in their destruction of Tibetan culture, that they contain elements of cultural genocide.

The Chinese government's aggressive security response has made the situation more unstable and potentially dangerous, risking more self-immolations. ICT continues to call on the Chinese government to address the substantial grievances of the Tibetan people through dialogue, and not through the use of intimidation or force.

### **Tibet and the threat to stability within the PRC**

Chinese leaders seek stability in Tibet, but they strive to achieve it through an iron fist rather than an outstretched hand. These hard-line measures are having the opposite effect, sowing instability exemplified in acts of protest, defiance, and self-immolation.

In his visit to Washington last week, Kalon Tripa Lobsang Sangay (the political leader of the Tibetan government in exile), told a reporter that, “If Tibet is granted autonomy, that could be a catalyst for moderation of China because if the Chinese government grants autonomy to Tibetans, for the first time they are accepting diversity within and accepting a distinct if not different people. I think no system which is authoritarian, or one-party rule, can last long. Ultimately, other people have to be taken into consideration, have to be empowered and respected by the system, because universality of freedom is established now.”

Tibet is a loss-leader for Beijing. Some 90 percent of the budget of the Tibet Autonomous Region comes as subsidies from the central government. In 2011, Human Rights Watch reported that Chinese security spending in the Aba Tibetan autonomous prefecture in Sichuan province was "five times the average spent per person on public security in non-Tibetan areas in Sichuan." Alternatively, if Chinese leaders were to give Tibetans a voice in their own affairs and a stake in their own future, through genuine autonomy, Tibetan areas could be more economically self-sustaining.

### **‘For China, Syria is Tibet’**

Strategically, the Chinese position on the ongoing crisis in Syria clearly shows that China is driven by its single-pointed agenda of holding on to power and has no regard for international norms. This is best explained by Michael Ignatieff in the New York Review of Books Blog (July 11) wherein he says, “What makes Syria a hinge-moment is that Russia and China are proving that they have no strategic interest in transitions beyond dictatorship, not just in Syria but anywhere else. Both Russia and China see Syria not

through the prism of international peace and security or human rights, but through the logic of their own despotism. For Putin, Syria is Chechnya; for China it is Tibet. They understand Assad perfectly. He is doing what they have done many times and they want the world to understand that they will support any dictator facing similar challenges.”

The larger issue here is the Chinese doctrine of ‘non-interference’ in the affairs of others, which is being challenged by developments in Syria, Libya, Sudan/South Sudan and elsewhere. Because of its sensitivity over the legitimacy of its control over Tibet, and other historical reasons, Beijing can be a stubborn partner in international efforts to address such crises, as shown by its vetoes of U.N. Security Council Resolutions on Syria.

A durable solution to the Tibet issue wouldn’t guarantee that China would become a more responsible actor, but it could help put them on a better path.

### **China’s interference in Nepal and Outcome on Tibetans**

Tibetan refugees transit through Nepal as they flee persecution at home and toward freedom in India or beyond. They leave because of China’s increased crackdown on religious freedoms, Communist Party control of Tibetan monasteries, and clampdown on Tibetan political activities. Unfortunately, these abuses inside Tibet are being exported to Nepal under pressure from the Chinese Embassy there.

An article in Time on July 17, 2012, says, “Since the Dalai Lama fled in 1959, Nepal has played a critical role for the Tibetan exile community, providing safe haven and a passageway to India. But in recent years, Nepal’s hospitality has waned — and the reason, many say, is China’s growing influence on the country’s political elite.”

For many years, there had been an informal arrangement in the form of a “gentleman’s agreement” between the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Nepalese Government by which the Nepal facilitated safe passage of Tibetan refugees to India. This agreement remains intact, but it is vulnerable. Tibetans trying to flee into Nepal today have to face great suffering at the hand of Nepalese security authorities. There have been reports about Nepalese security personnel “apprehending Tibetans far inside Nepal, robbing them, and then returning them to Tibet at gunpoint, where they are typically imprisoned and not uncommonly tortured by the Chinese.”

Jon Kraukauer, who wrote an investigative article in The New Yorker titled, “Why is Nepal Cracking Down on Tibetan Refugees” on December 28, 2011, says, “These violations of the U.N.H.C.R agreement and international law were bought and paid for by Beijing.” He also quotes US Embassy officials in Nepal as saying, “Beijing has asked Kathmandu to step up patrols...and make it more difficult for Tibetans to enter Nepal.”

China is spending a lot of money in Nepal to develop infrastructure. In return, Chinese officials demand that the Nepalese shrink the space for Tibetans to live and speak. At the same time, there is a diversity of voices inside Nepal, and many Nepalese recognize and cherish the long-standing Tibetan Buddhist heritage in their country. The U.S.

government has done a good job in promoting this diversity and respect for the rights of Tibetans in Nepal. We ask the Committee to urge the State Department to keep up this effort.

But also, we ask Congress and the Administration to look at Nepal through the strategic lens of Chinese ambitions among its neighbors. Just as the State Department and Pentagon have focused attention on China's posture toward its southeast in the South China Sea, they should also take a close look at China's southwest, and its power projection through Tibet and into Nepal.

### **Threat to academic freedom in the United States**

The Committee is aware of China's efforts to 'soft power,' having held hearings on legislation such as the China Democracy Promotion Act and the Chinese Media Reciprocity Act.

In recent years, China has established more than 300 Confucius Institutes at universities around the world. According to Chinese media, there are 81 Confucius Institutes and more than 300 Confucius Classrooms in the U.S. The stated aim is to promote learning of the Mandarin language and understanding of Chinese culture. However, these Institutes come with strings attached, which create challenges to academic freedom. We have seen reported, and heard anecdotal evidence, that discussion on sensitive topics such as Tibet are discouraged if not prohibited.

Further, the Institutes are used as dissemination platforms for Chinese propaganda on Tibet. A Xinhua report of January 10, 2012 confirmed that a journal published in Chinese by the official Tibetan Academy of Social Sciences was being "...mainly distributed to foreign embassies and diplomatic missions in China, as well as universities, research institutes and worldwide Confucius Institutes."

The New York Times on March 4, 2012, carried an article headlined "Critics Worry About Influence of Chinese Institutes on U.S. Campuses" in which Prof. June Teufel Dreyer is quoted on how the Institutes have to toe the Chinese official line on issues such as Tibet:

"There is a whole list of proscribed topics," said June Teufel Dreyer, who teaches Chinese government and foreign policy at the University of Miami. "You're told not to discuss the Dalai Lama — or to invite the Dalai Lama to campus. Tibet, Taiwan, China's military buildup, factional fights inside the Chinese leadership — these are all off limits."

Similarly, Prof. Anne-Marie Brady, associate professor of political science at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand, has compared the independence of Confucius Institutes with that of a Chinese citizen. She is quoted in a publication on Higher Education as saying, "They've got a lot of space, but the same kind of space that people

have in China, which is that there are always no-go zones, and the no-go zones are obvious: Tibet, Taiwan, Falun Gong. And academia does not have no-go zones."

Last year, the International Campaign for Tibet requested resource materials from a Confucius Institute at a U.S. university. What we received were books and DVDs giving the Chinese narrative on Tibet published by China Intercontinental Press, which is described by a Chinese government-run website as operating "under the authority of the State Council Information Office...whose main function is to produce propaganda products."

### **Tibet's waters and regional security**

Tibet is strategically important to China due to its centrality in Asia's hydrological cycle. Tibet is known as the 'Third Pole,' for having the most frozen fresh water outside the North and South Poles. It is also called the 'The Water Tower of Asia' for being the source of major rivers that flow into India, Bangladesh, China, Nepal, Pakistan, Thailand, Myanmar and Vietnam. Scholar Brahma Chellaney wrote in his book entitled "Water" that "Control over the 'blue gold' wealth of the Tibetan Plateau makes China a potential water power in the way Saudi Arabia is an oil power."

China is engaged in a number of dam construction and water diversion projects on the rivers that emanate from the Tibetan plateau, such as the Salween and Mekong rivers, sparking criticism that these moves could be devastating for downstream communities. As the populations of South and Southeast Asia continue to grow, water scarcity will become more acute, which could lead to conflicts between China and its neighbors over water resources.

Currently, there exists no regional framework for these nations to discuss or negotiate over water resources. A treaty or framework would create a system of modern water rights based around an integrated water resource act; ideally, it would include all Asian countries that depend upon the Tibetan Plateau for their water. The U.S. government, which has increasingly focused on water as a security issue, should encourage and offer support in development of a regional framework on water security.

### **Recommendations**

- *Pass H.Res. 609, the Tibet resolution.* Given the unimaginable incidents of self-immolations in Tibet and the Chinese unwillingness to address the genuine grievances of the Tibetan people, the Congress should send a strong message by passing the bipartisan resolution (H. Res. 609) expressing support for the people of Tibet that is cosponsored by Representatives James Sensenbrenner and George Miller.
- *Update and strengthen the Tibetan Policy Act of 2002.* The Committee should explore ways to strengthen the Act to take into account new developments in Tibetan politics, including the devolution of political power by His Holiness the

Dalai Lama, and the election of full democratic governance in exile. It should consider enhancing the U.S. relationship with the Central Tibetan Administration. Lastly, the Act should 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.

- *Human Rights Dialogue follow-up.* The Committee should invite Assistant Secretary Michael Posner to provide a public readout of the discussions in the just-concluded US-China Human Rights Dialogue as there is a dire need for an open and transparent display of what the Administration is doing in concrete terms on the issue of human rights in China and Tibet. Further, the Committee should urge the Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues to work with the new interagency Atrocities Prevention Board to ensure that the situation in Tibet is on their watch-list.
- *News blackout in Tibet.* China's censorship and information and communication blockade, specifically in Tibet, does not enable the world to know about the reality of the Tibetan situation. Congress should continue to fund robustly the Tibetan language services of the Voice of America and Radio Free Asia. It should urge the State Department to task the United States Embassy and consulates in China to expand their outreach to the Tibetan communities and monitoring of the Tibetan situation. It should train Tibetan language speakers to monitor Tibetan blogs and social media sites. Specifically, the United States should vigorously pursue its long-stated goal of establishing a consulate in Lhasa.
- *Restrictions on Chinese delegations from or about Tibet.* Three-quarters of consular requests to visit Tibetan areas are denied. 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. At the same time, 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.
- *Nepal.* The Committee should investigate China's interference in the internal affairs of Nepal. It should urge the Administration to assess strategically and respond to China's ambitions to its southwest, as it has been doing with the South China Sea to China's southeast.
- *Confucius Institutes.* The Committee should devote oversight to Confucius Institutes, and look at whether the terms of their agreements at universities or their practices result in reduced academic discourse and freedom of speech on topics such as Tibet, and whether such agreements or practices violate any laws in relation to publicly-funded universities.

- *Tibet's water and regional security.* The United States government should encourage and offer support in the development of a regional framework on water security, in relation to the major rivers of Asia that flow from the Tibetan Plateau and are subject to current and potential Chinese dam and diversion projects.