

## **Opening Statement of U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown, Cochairman of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC)**

### **CECC Roundtable on "The Dalai Lama: What He Means For Tibetans Today"**

**July 13, 2011**

There are a number of Commission vacancies and I hope that they will be filled soon.

In the meantime, I want to assure everyone who is interested in the Commission's work that it will continue and that the outstanding staff has continued its important mission.

Today's roundtable is on "The Dalai Lama: What He Means for Tibetans Today."

In many ways, this roundtable can mean what he means for all of us who care about basic human rights for everyone.

Thousands of people, including many Tibetans, gathered in Washington, DC this past week to hear His Holiness the Dalai Lama perform a sacred ritual and share his teachings on world peace.

The world knows His Holiness as a Nobel Peace Prize winner, a symbol of compassion, and guardian of the Tibetan people.

Since the 1950s, he has made peaceful overtures to the Chinese government. As a result he was forced into exile into the Indian Himalayans.

The president met with the Dalai Lama last time and I hope he will meet with him again this time.

For decades the Dalai Lama led Tibet's peaceful campaign for legitimate Tibetan political and cultural rights through prayer and speech, traveling across the world, even as foreign governments worried about Chinese reprisal for welcoming their so-called "separatist."

But in recent months he has reduced his political role so he can focus on spiritual matters.

Regardless of his role, His Holiness the Dalai Lama remains the best hope for restoring stability to Tibet and guaranteeing the genuine autonomy that is the right of Tibetans.

And the genuine autonomy that is the right of other ethnic minority groups in China.

Tibetans in China continue to suffer from human rights abuses and restrictions on their constitutional and universal rights to the freedom of religion, expression, and association.

These abuses are deliberate acts of the Chinese State.

The attack on Tibetan language, culture, religion, and rich history is intentional and political. It is harsh and brutal.

Just as they've done with the Uyghur people, the Chinese government has attacked every aspect of life and culture of Tibetans.

And just as they've done with leading critics of government policies like Rebiya Kadeer, the government has done everything it can to discredit and subvert the Dalai Lama.

Last month's Commission Roundtable heard from Chinese legal experts who discussed how the Communist Chinese government sees lawyers as a threat to stability to the regime.

The Roundtable briefly touched on how in the United States—and other democratic nations—lawyers are in many ways the foundation of stability of the state.

In repressing defenders of rights, China suppresses the diversity of cultures.

The Beijing government treats legitimate expression of cultural diversity as a threat to sovereignty. In the United States our very motto is "E Pluribus Unum," out of many there is one—that our strength as one nation comes from the diversity of its people.

Yet respect and recognition of fundamental rights is essential for the preservation and celebration of China's minority cultures.

The situation in Tibet remains abysmal since the Chinese government's violent crackdown on largely peaceful protests that began in March 2008.

According to the Commission's own Political Prisoner Database, hundreds of political prisoners remain imprisoned.

Far from seeing the Dalai Lama as an indispensable negotiating partner, Chinese officials continue their attempts to discredit him.

Negotiations between the two sides have stalled, with the longest break since formal dialogue resumed in 2002.

At this critical moment, we have gathered an expert group of panelists to discuss what the Dalai Lama means to Tibetans—and to our world.