

**Statement of Maria Otero, Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs  
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Congressional-Executive Commission on China**

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

**July 13, 2011**

Thank you, Senator Brown, other Commission Members and staff for convening this roundtable. It's my pleasure to be able to participate today for the first time as a Commissioner and to make brief remarks on the Dalai Lama as the Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues.

I have had the honor of meeting several times with the Dalai Lama as an internationally recognized religious leader and Nobel Laureate. I have also had an opportunity to speak with Tibetan Buddhists in remote settlements in India and with new arrivals and long staying Tibetan refugees in Nepal. I have learned that for many of them, the Dalai Lama is the earthly manifestation of the living Buddha. To young Tibetans, I have seen that the Dalai Lama is a positive example of how to make the world a better place, and is a source of wisdom and compassion in their personal lives.

The Dalai Lama's views are widely reflected within Tibetan society, and command the respect of the vast majority of Tibetans. The U.S. government believes that the Dalai Lama can be a constructive partner for China, particularly as it deals with the challenge of resolving continuing tensions in Tibetan areas. His consistent advocacy of non-violence is an important factor in reaching an eventual lasting solution. China's engagement with the Dalai Lama, or his representatives, to resolve problems facing Tibetans is in the interests of the Chinese government and the Tibetan people. We believe failure to address these problems and reexamine existing, counterproductive policies will exacerbate already existing tensions that could, in turn, undermine China's efforts to maintain its current social and economic development.

The Administration's goals on Tibetan issues are twofold. First, it is to promote a substantive, results oriented dialogue between the Chinese Government and the Dalai Lama or his representatives. Second, it is to help sustain Tibet's unique religious, linguistic, and cultural heritages. The Administration at all levels—from the President, Secretary, Assistant Secretaries, to myself—has urged the Chinese Government to engage in a dialogue with the representatives of the Dalai Lama. We remind the Chinese government that the vast majority of Tibetans advocate non-violent solutions to Tibetan issues and genuine autonomy—not independence or sovereignty—in order to preserve Tibet's unique culture, religion and its fragile environment. Regrettably, the Chinese government has not engaged in a substantive dialogue with the Tibetans since January 2010.

I want to take this opportunity to briefly mention some of our concerns and ongoing activities. We are extremely concerned about the deteriorating human rights situation in China and in particular in the Tibet Autonomous Region and other ethnic Tibetan areas in neighboring provinces. Recent regulations restricting Tibetan language education, strict controls over the practice of Tibetan Buddhism, the arrests of prominent non-political Tibetans, and the heavy security presence reflect the difficult human rights situation there today. The forcible removal of monks from Kirti Monastery is also a cause for deep concern.

Despite many challenges, we are committed to continuing our long-standing support for non-governmental organizations that work in ethnic Tibetan areas and assist Tibetan refugees in South Asia. Both the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development support cultural and linguistic preservation, sustainable development and environmental preservation in Tibet and Tibetan majority areas, as well as

Tibetan refugee communities in other countries, through numerous programs. In addition, the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration continues its long-standing support for Tibetan refugees through ongoing support to non-governmental organizations as well as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. In fiscal year 2010, \$3.5 million was provided to support reception services, education, healthcare, and water and sanitation for Tibetan refugees in South Asia, including new arrivals from China.

At the end of this month, the U.S. Agency for International Development's India Mission will issue an award for a new \$2 million, two-year program to support Tibetan settlements in India, Nepal, and Bhutan. The new program will support the development of organic agriculture for selected Tibetan settlements in India, Nepal, and Bhutan; and provide vocational training to Tibetan youth remaining in the settlements. USAID anticipates the program will result in increased economic opportunities which will encourage youth to remain in the settlements, strengthen community ties, and preserve cultural and linguistic traditions. Strengthening Tibetan communities and preserving their extraordinary cultural and religious traditions have been at the center of the Dalai Lama's work.

The Dalai Lama celebrated his 76th birthday last week in Washington, joined by thousands of Tibetans. While he is still vigorous and healthy, it is my great hope that Chinese leaders will seize this opportunity to pursue a substantive dialogue to resolve remaining differences and provide the next generation of Tibetans and Chinese with peace, prosperity, and genuine stability.