

Prepared Statement of Ngawang Sangdrol, Former Tibetan Political Prisoner

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

July 13, 2011

I would like to first thank you very much for inviting me to speak here today.

1. My name is Ngawang Sangdrol. When I was 13 years old I joined a peaceful demonstration. I shouted "free Tibet" and "long live the Dalai Lama." Just because of these two slogans, they put me in jail and tortured me. They sentenced me to 23 years but due to international pressure, especially US Congressional support, I was released after 11 years. Now I live in a free country. But thousands of Tibetans are still suffering in those same prisons today.

2. His Holiness the Dalai Lama is very important for all Tibetans, but especially important for those political prisoners. Countless Tibetans have died under China's persecution but those who are still alive, their greatest wish is to see His Holiness. His Holiness is our refuge not only in this life but also in future lives.

3. In my own experience as a political prisoner, when I was in solitary confinement for six months, the conditions were terrible. For the first ten days in this small dark cell I would be given only one meal a day of a tiny dumpling without any meat. There were rats, which terrified me, and it was so cold. The bed was a thin piece of cloth and the blanket was very thin. But every day I imagined His Holiness at the top of my head. This gave me peace of mind, although physical conditions were terrible. This was the only thing that gave me some strength to live.

4. I feel the Dalai Lama should be allowed to go home. Of course, that is not going to solve the whole problem. But this is something that would be so powerful and important for the Tibetan people. He is not only important for this generation, but for generations to come. China tried to extinguish Tibet. But it is because of the Dalai Lama that the Tibetan spirit and culture is still so strong today.

5. Finally, Tibet has many problems, but our biggest problem is the political situation. If the political problem is solved, all our other problems can be managed. Therefore, please do everything you can to bring peace and freedom in Tibet.

Thank you.