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**Statement of Rep. James P. McGovern
Co-chair, Congressional-Executive Commission on China**

**Hearing on
Tibet: “Barriers to Settling an Unresolved Conflict”
Thursday, June 23, 2022, 9:00 a.m.**

As delivered

Thank you, very much Mr. Chairman, and I too also want to welcome our friends who are visiting Washington to participate in the World Parliamentary Conference on Tibet.

I want to especially welcome the members of the Tibetan parliament-in-exile. We have two members of the Canadian parliament here. I welcome our friends from ICT. And I welcome my dear friend Richard Gere, who has been an incredible activist and advocate for human rights in Tibet. We are delighted you are all here.

I appreciate that we are holding this hearing on Tibet, the status of dialogue, and a path forward in the Tibetan quest for rights and dignity.

Congress has had a long and abiding interest in Tibet. It created Tibetan language broadcasting, scholarships and exchanges for Tibetans, and aid programs in Tibet and in exile. In 2002, Congress passed the landmark Tibetan Policy Act, and codified the position of Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues.

Support for Tibet transcends the partisan divide. Congressman Tom Lantos and Senator Jesse Helms stood side by side with the Dalai

Lama. So did President Bush and Speaker Pelosi, who presented him with the Congressional Gold Medal in 2007.

I have had the honor of authoring the two most recent Tibet bills to be enacted into law.

The Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act seeks to enable diplomats, journalists and tourists travel and see Tibet with their own eyes, because Chinese officials have closed it off.

The Tibetan Policy and Support Act expands the U.S. policy approach. As its key feature, the bill makes it U.S. policy that the succession or reincarnation of Tibetan Buddhist leaders, including a future 15th Dalai Lama, is an exclusively religious matter that should be decided solely by the Tibetan Buddhist community. Not by China.

Congress and the U.S. government have advocated for the human rights and religious freedom of the Tibetan people. But the core problem remains that the Tibetan people cannot advocate for themselves. They are forced to live in an authoritarian system under a paranoid central government that sees any expression of distinct identity as a threat to their power.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama says it doesn't have to be this way. He is right. For decades he sought to negotiate with Chinese authorities. He did so in good faith.

The Chinese side did agree to ten rounds of dialogue. They talked to the Dalai Lama's envoys. But they did not do so in good faith.

Chinese officials say they will return to the table only if the Dalai Lama meets certain demands – demands that are not only unreasonable, but false.

The U.S. government, to its credit, has consistently called on the Chinese to return to dialogue, without preconditions. But that hasn't

worked. For 12 years, the Tibetans stood ready, the Americans asked, but the Chinese turned away.

Should we keep doing it this way, or should we explore some other tactic or strategy? That is the question we will explore in this hearing.

Our witnesses today bring expertise and a variety of perspectives – legal, historical, policy, and personal – on the Tibet-China dialogue.

We hope to hear what Congress and the U.S. government can do to help. Should we be countering false Chinese narratives? Should we reorient how we talk about the basis for dialogue? Is dialogue even possible in the current environment, and what would be the alternatives?

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to consider these important questions. I look forward to our hearing.