

Chairman Smith, chairman Merkley, members of the committee and distinguished guests

Thank you for inviting me for this hearing alongside a person who continues to play a very significant role in keeping the hopes of the Tibetan people alive and someone I hold dear, Richard Gere, Chairman of the International Campaign for Tibet. You have also invited two prominent Tibetans, Lhadon Tethong and Tenzin Dorje of the Tibet Action Institute, both competent in leadership and now known for their research on challenges confronting Tibetans inside Tibet, including the colonial-style boarding schools. I am sure, with them speaking in detail on some of the specific issues, I request the chairs to consider my written submission as part of the testimony and I assure our Administration's complete cooperation on any additional information that the committee may need.

As the democratically elected leader of the Tibetan people, the Central Tibetan Administration of which I am the Sikyong, is fully committed to following the Middle Way Policy: the way forward shown by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and adopted by the Tibetan Parliament in Exile. This policy is aimed at finding a non-violent, mutually beneficial, negotiated and lasting solution to the Sino-Tibet conflict that can set an example to this violence-ridden world. Resolution to the Sino-Tibet conflict can have profound geo-political implications for a more peaceful and secure region and the world.

The absence of traction on dialogue since 2010 sounds ominous, but we remain positive about finding a peaceful solution that avoids extreme polarities. The sincerity of the People's Republic of China's (PRC) leadership manifests in the policies and programs being implemented in Tibet as we speak. In the last few years, evidence emerging out from Tibet in the form of reports by the UN, independent institutes and scholarly research, the Chinese government's one nation, one language, one culture and one religion is aimed at forced assimilation and the erasure of the national identity of the Tibetans and other minority nationalities. Unsurprisingly, the international watchdog, Freedom House lists Tibet right at the bottom with Syria and South Sudan in their least free country index.

We often get asked as to why we don't hear about Tibet any more. PRC's Orwellian gridlock system, use of all means of artificial intelligence to surveil people, control the flow of information, and lockdown of Tibet to the outside world. Even those in leadership roles in education, religion, culture and environment are being arbitrarily arrested or just disappear. One's actions are linked to welfare of one's near and dear ones. 157 Tibetans were known to have self-immolated since 2009, hoping against hope that the PRC government would pay some attention to their plight and hoping against hope that the international community would come to their rescue, but to no avail. The Chinese government focuses too much on development and fails to understand the real aspirations of the Tibetan people.

Tibetan language, religion and culture are the bedrock of Tibetan identity. Compassion and non-violence, which form the foundation of our culture, will undoubtedly promote peace and harmony in the world. However, these are facing unprecedented threat of eradication. The atheist Chinese government is trying to fully control the process and authority of recognising the reincarnation of Trulkus, that is unique to Tibetan Buddhism, besides interference in the study of Buddhist philosophy and control on their movement.

To speed up assimilation, large-scale forced relocation of Tibetans from their traditional homeland to Chinese territories and within Tibet, mass transfer of Tibetan youths to China for labour and incentivised migration of Han Chinese into Tibet are being carried out. Moreover, Tibetan children across Tibet are not only being coerced into colonial boarding schools but transferred to areas across China on a massive scale.

As part of the fifty-year China's Western Development Programme started at the beginning of this millennium, unscrupulous use of natural resources and reckless construction of dams, railway and road network, airports and other infrastructure in Tibet threatens irreversible damage to Tibet's fragile environment. Tibet is known as Asia's Water Tower and the third pole because of the amount of glaciers and permafrost that feeds all the major rivers of Asia. Therefore, it concerns not only Tibet and the Tibetan people but has serious implications on the food, economic, and water security of a population of about 2 billion people living in the downstream countries that depend on rivers originating from the Tibetan plateau.

If PRC is not made to reverse or change its current policies, Tibet and Tibetans will definitely die a slow death.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I would like to express appreciation for organising this very important hearing. These hearings are a boost to the indomitable spirit of the Tibetans inside Tibet and source of inspiration for the Tibetans in exile to continue with our just struggle.

I wish to reiterate our gratitude to the US Congress for making necessary changes to the Tibet Policy Act.

The continuous support from the Congress, Government and People of the U.S. will enable the resolution of the Sino-Tibet Conflict through the Middle-Way Policy, which will bring peace to Tibet and beyond. I fervently hope that the Bill on Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Conflict Act introduced in both Houses of the U.S. Congress will be made into law.

Thank you very much for the opportunity again.

Penpa Tsering
Sikyong