

REPORT

Building Parliamentary Momentum for Tibet

**Roundtable Discussion
Parliament of Canada
April 22, 2015**



Introduction

On April 22, 2015, a roundtable discussion entitled "Building Momentum for Tibet" took place on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. The event marked the annual day of action organized by Tibet groups in Canada in association with the *Canadian Parliamentary Friends of Tibet*.²

Seventeen Members of Parliament and staff representing each of Canada's political parties participated in the roundtable along with a representative of the Department of Foreign Affairs, members of the Tibetan community in Canada, and observers.³

Presentations offered an overview of the Central Tibetan Administration's (government-in-exile) Middle Way Approach, an update on Sino-Tibetan negotiations, a description of legislative initiatives in various countries, and an analysis of the broader Canada-China relationship. Speakers also reviewed China's most recent "white paper on Tibet".

Following the formal presentations, MPs tabled recommendations for future parliamentary action in support of Tibet. Those recommendations are compiled at the conclusion of this report.

Summary of the presentations

1. Status of Sino-Tibet Negotiations: Tashi Wangdi, former Minister of International Relations of the Tibetan government-in-exile and former member of the Tibetan Taskforce on Sino-Tibetan Negotiations

In 1979, His Holiness the Dalai Lama received a message from Deng Xiaoping advising that representatives of his government were ready to discuss all matters related to the Tibet issue with the exception of independence. The Chinese leader offered to commence talks with the Dalai Lama who responded positively and with assurances that he was not seeking independence. Subsequently four fact-finding delegations traveled to Tibet and two high level delegations visited Beijing between 1980 and 1985.

Following a series of dialogue sessions between Chinese officials and representatives of the Dalai Lama, the Chinese side requested a written proposal from the Tibetan administration. In 2008 the Dalai Lama's envoys presented the *Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy for the*

² The roundtable event was organized by the Canada Tibet Committee in association with the Parliamentary Friends of Tibet and in collaboration with the Tibetan Cultural Association of Quebec, the Canadian Tibetan Association of Ontario, the Tibetan Women's Association, and the Canadian Friends of Tibet. Organizational profiles are appended.

³ Participant list appended.

Tibetan People which outlines a “Middle Way Approach” to resolving the conflict in Tibet. The proposal was quickly rejected by the Chinese leadership whose primary objection was the concept of a single administration for Tibetans in China. In 2009, the first self-immolations took place.

In 2010 the Tibetan leadership released its explanatory *Note on the Memorandum* in response to Chinese objections.⁴ The *Note* reiterated the Dalai Lama’s vision of autonomy within the framework of the People’s Republic of China. Again, the explanatory note was rejected by the Chinese side and the dialogue sessions were suspended. There have been no further dialogue sessions since 2010. The total number of self-immolations has now reached 139.⁵

In April 2015, the Government of China released its 13th “white paper” on Tibet entitled “Tibet's Path of Development Is Driven by an Irresistible Historical Tide”. The paper is primarily a critique of the Middle Way Approach and a condemnation of the Dalai Lama. It alleges that:

- The Tibetan people already enjoy autonomy;
- The Middle Way Approach is a “stepping stone for independence”;
- The Dalai Lama is personally responsible for the difficult situation in Tibet;
- The Dalai Lama is personally responsible for the breakdown of the dialogue process.

The white paper further states that China will not negotiate anything except the personal future of the Dalai Lama and that as a precondition for that negotiation, the Dalai Lama must “make a public statement acknowledging that Tibetan has been an integral part of China since antiquity”.

Looking forward, His Holiness the Dalai Lama – who devolved all political power to an elected Tibetan leadership in 2011 - places his hope in the growing number of Chinese scholars, intellectuals, Buddhists and government bureaucrats, who support the Middle Way Approach. The Tibetan administration continues to pursue dialogue through its various channels.

Parliamentarians in Canada can support this effort by:

- Being clear with the Government of China and its representatives that demonizing the Dalai Lama is counter-productive;
- Urging the Government of China allow free access to Tibet for international observers, media and other types of delegations;

⁴ Both these documents can be found at <http://mwa.tibet.net/>. The website also contains a chronology of the dialogue process and related information.

⁵ For an updated list of self-immolators and their personal profiles, see <http://www.savetibet.org/resources/factsheets/self-immolations-by-tibetans/>

- Suggesting (as has been recommended by the Tibetan administration) that an independent investigation be launched into the allegations made by the Government of China against the Dalai Lama;
- Actively supporting the Tibetan cause whenever possible and facilitating coordinated efforts within the Parliament of Canada and with parliaments in other countries;
- Encouraging the Government of Canada to lead a coordinated multilateral approach to resolving the conflict in Tibet.

References: The *Memorandum* and its *Note* can be found at <http://mwa.tibet.net/>. The website also contains a detailed chronology of the Sino-Tibet dialogue process and related information. China's white paper on Tibet can be found at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2015-04/15/c_134152612.htm

2. International Legislative Initiatives for Tibet: Matteo Mecacci, President, International Campaign for Tibet (Washington DC)

Since the 2008 uprising across Tibet, which was the largest uprising since 1959, there have been at least 139 self-immolations by Tibetans from every walk of life. Almost every self-immolator called for freedom and the return of the Dalai Lama to Tibet.

In carrying out their act of protest, none of the self-immolators injured anyone other than themselves. At least 20 are known to have survived their action and were taken away by authorities. Their whereabouts remain unknown. Several family members and individuals who reported the self-immolations on social media were arrested.

It is impossible for the international community to obtain reliable information from inside Tibet where access is tightly controlled and freedom of expression is curtailed by the threat of arrest. In fact, Tibet is one of the least accessible places in the world for government and UN officials, for media, for non-governmental organizations, and even for individual citizens of other countries. It is astounding when one realizes that there are more foreign correspondents in Pyongyang than there are in Lhasa. There are no foreign correspondents in Lhasa.

Despite numerous requests by the US to establish a consular office in Lhasa, Nepal is the only country with a diplomatic presence in the Tibetan capital. Partly for this reason, two US Congressmen have introduced a bill that would deny reciprocal access for Chinese officials wishing to visit the United States as long as US representatives are prevented access to Tibet. That bill has been introduced for the second time in the US Congress and has now an increasing number of co-sponsors.

Today there are serious concerns regarding the restriction of religious practices in Tibet. In particular, high-level Chinese officials have been saying that selection of the Dalai Lama's eventual successor will be made by the Chinese Communist Party. While the international community might laugh at such a statement, it is a serious concern for the Tibetan people who do not see it as an empty threat. On May 17, 1995, the Chinese police abducted 6 year old Gendun Choekyi Nyima who had been chosen by the Dalai Lama just days before as the new Panchen Lama. The Government of China quickly named its own pretender to the title. Neither Gendun Choekyi Nyima nor his family have been seen or heard from for 20 years despite numerous requests by the United Nations and various governments.

Interference with the succession of the Dalai Lama will exacerbate an already tense situation and lead to more instability in Tibet. It is therefore a priority for parliamentarians, politicians, and other prominent individuals to publicly and consistently assert the position that the Dalai Lama's succession is the business of the Tibetan Buddhist community and not of the Government of China or its ruling party.

As a means to maintain international pressure, the Government of the United States adopted the Tibetan Policy Act in 2002. In addition to providing an annual financial allocation, the Act created the office of "Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues" which falls within the mandate of Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights. The Special Coordinator's central objective is to promote substantive dialogue between the Chinese government and the Dalai Lama or his representatives with a view to resolving differences. The Special Coordinator must report to Congress annually.

The Tibetan Policy Act also identifies conditions for lenders, non-governmental organizations and "US entities" seeking to participate in the economic development of Tibet. These conditions include conducting ex-ante impact assessments, ensuring Tibetan participation, allowing independent monitors, excluding resettlement components, and excluding the transfer of land or natural resources to non-Tibetans. This may be of interest to Canadian MPs given the number of Canadian extractive companies active in Tibet.

This year, our friends in the US Congress are preparing a special resolution to commemorate the Dalai Lama's 80th birthday. I will be happy to work with counterparts in Canada to coordinate wording if a similar all-party resolution can be made in the Canadian parliament. Such messages send a powerful message to China.

References: The *US Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act of 2015* is found here: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/1112> The *Tibetan Policy Act of 2002* can be found at <https://www.savetibet.org/policy-center/tibetan-policy-act/>

3. The Broader China Context: Alex Neve, Secretary General, Amnesty International
Canada

Over the past twenty years Canada has pursued a wide variety of approaches to raising human rights concerns in its relationship with China. There was a time when the Canadian government was actively and openly critical of human rights violations in China and worked with other governments in an effort to highlight those concerns at the UN Commission on Human Rights and other multilateral settings.

That gave way in 1997 to a new policy under which there was no longer public criticism of China at the UN or bilaterally and instead human rights concerns were raised privately behind closed doors on an annual basis in a human rights dialogue between the two countries. The dialogue lacked transparency, had no real expertise behind it, had very little continuity among officials involved, and did not establish any benchmarks to evaluate progress. Following a government-initiated assessment in 2005, the bilateral dialogue was eventually shelved.

For a brief period following the 2006 election that brought the present government to power, senior members of the government, including the Prime Minister, were more outspoken about human rights concerns in China. This outspokenness was marked by high-profile advocacy on behalf of an imprisoned Canadian of Uyghur origin, Huseyin Celil, and the decision to bestow honorary Canadian citizenship on His Holiness the Dalai Lama in 2006.

That approach was quickly abandoned, largely due to pressure from business leaders who were concerned that it was straining Canada's relationship with China. Even though the Parliamentary Subcommittee on International Human Rights completed a study on the promotion of democracy in China in 2011, it was not adopted by the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade and never published. For the past 6 or 7 years there has been little public criticism or advocacy by the Canadian government with respect to human rights concerns in China. At the same time, there is no longer a human rights dialogue between the two governments.

A review of 21 Canadian government press releases and public statements dealing with China since the beginning of 2014 reveals that only 5, less than 25%, addressed human rights concerns. None of those releases and statements was made at the Ministerial level; all were either from the Minister's Parliamentary Secretary or Canada's Ambassador of Religious Freedom. The press release concluding Prime Minister Harper's November 2014 visit to China does not address human rights; though he made some brief comments about human rights during media interviews during the visit.

What all of these different policy phases have in common is the lack of a coherent, comprehensive strategy to guide Canada's approach to promoting human rights reform in China. The Canadian government should launch a process, involving both Parliamentarians and civil society, leading to the adoption of a *Human Rights Strategy for Canada's Relationship with China*. It is vital that such a strategy incorporate the following 7 key aspects:

- i. Blend of public and private approaches: The strategy should recognize the importance both of raising issues forcefully behind closed doors and of backing that up publicly with statements and other pressure to convey the message that Canada is serious.
- ii. All hands on deck: The strategy must make it clear that human rights is the responsibility of everyone in the Canadian government and is not solely the role of one officer in the Pearson Building and one diplomat in Beijing who have human rights in their job description. No matter their level of commitment, dedication and skill – which has often been considerable – they can only go so far and do so much. Human rights must be a paramount concern for all government officials dealing with China – elected and career – and at all levels.
- iii. Whole of government: The strategy must apply across the whole of the Canadian government, with human rights on the table no matter the issue that arises in the relationship. Is China interested in investing in the oil sands? Talk about human rights. Is China promoting its bid for the 2022 Winter Olympics? Talk about human rights. Is Canada seeking new investment possibilities? Talk about human rights. Are Canada and China meeting on the margins of a UN Summit? Talk about human rights. Are arrangements being made for a Canada/China youth exchange? Talk about human rights.
- iv. Working multilaterally: The strategy must have a multilateral component and make a determined effort to find ways and means to work together with other countries, cross-regionally, in responding to human rights concerns and promoting human rights in China. Multilateralism is always a good human rights strategy; it is critical when dealing with a country as powerful and influential as China
- v. Home and abroad: The strategy should focus on domestic and foreign policy imperatives. Canada needs to engage with the Chinese government about Tibet, Xinjiang and the crackdown on activists. Canada must also push China to use its influence to end human rights crises in countries like South Sudan; promote reform in neighbouring countries such as Myanmar and North Korea; and champion UN initiatives on women's human rights and other crucial issues.
- vi. Transparency: The strategy must be accessible and transparent to Canadians. Canadians need to be able to follow, engage with and assess our government's approach to human rights in China. It goes to the heart of what Canada stands for as a nation; Canadians should not be left out.

- vii. Results: The strategy needs results. It is easy to say that we want to see human rights improvements in China; it is another thing to deliver. That means setting goals and benchmarks, measuring progress, reporting results, setting new goals and revising the strategy as needed.

In short, it is time for a Canada/China human rights strategy that:

- blends public and private approaches;
- recognizes human rights is the responsibility of all Canadian officials;
- cuts across the entirety of the Canada/China relationship;
- involves strong multilateral cooperation with other nations;
- focuses on both domestic and foreign policy concerns;
- is transparent and accessible to Canadians; and
- seeks to measure results through goals and benchmarks.

References:

Government assessment of its Bilateral Human Rights Dialogue with China is available for download at <http://spartan.ac.brocku.ca/~cburton/Assessment%20of%20the%20Canada-China%20Bilateral%20Human%20Rights%20Dialogue%2019APR06.pdf>

Recommendations resulting from the discussion

Following the 3 presentations, the floor was opened for discussion. Acknowledging that immediate options may be limited because of the fall 2015 federal election, MPs nevertheless put forward the following suggestions for future collaborative initiatives:

- i. Before the House rises for the summer 2015 break, the PFT should encourage adoption by the Parliament of Canada of an all-party resolution offering birthday wishes to the Dalai Lama on the occasion of his 80th birthday.
- ii. The PFT should submit a request through appropriate channels for a “take note” debate in the House of Commons on the Tibet issue. The request for a debate will highlight the continued deteriorating human rights situation in Tibet.
- iii. The PFT should intervene with Nepal’s representative in Canada to request his/her assistance in expediting Tibetan immigration to Canada from Nepal. The PFT intervention will encourage the lifting of bureaucratic obstacles in the form of denied

“exit permits” and other forms of red tape that prevent Tibetans living in Nepal from immigrating to Canada.

- iv. The PFT, with support of the Canada Tibet Committee and other Tibet groups in Canada, should launch a post-election campaign to recruit newly-elected MPs as members of the PFT. This effort might include a renewed “lobby days” project targeting newly-elected MPs.
 - v. Pursuant to recommendations following the 2012 World Parliamentarian Convention on Tibet and the 2013 testimony of Tibet’s political leader, Dr. Lobsang Sangay, at the Subcommittee on International Human Rights, the PFT should request from Chinese authorities, permission to travel to Tibet on an investigative mission. Should such permission be denied, the PFT should consider arrangements for a delegation to Dharamsala, India where the Tibetan administration is headquartered.
 - vi. The PFT should work more closely with the *International Network of Parliamentarians on Tibet* headquartered in The Hague. INPaT was created following the 2012 World Parliamentary Convention on Tibet held in Ottawa. www.inpatnet.org
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APPENDICES

Speaker bios

Tashi Wangdi was, for many years and until March 2015, a member of the Central Tibetan Administration's *Taskforce for Negotiations with the Government of China*. He previously served in the Tibetan administration since 1966 holding the position of Kalon (Cabinet Minister) in every major department, including the Department of Religion and Culture, Department of Home, Department of Education, Department of Information and International Relations, Department of Security, and Department of Health. During his lengthy career, Mr. Wangdi was also the official representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in New Delhi, New York and in Brussels.

Matteo Mecacci is the President of Washington-based *International Campaign for Tibet*. He is a former member of the Italian Parliament where he served on the Foreign Affairs Committee and was a member of the Italian delegation to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). In that role, he participated in more than 20 election-monitoring missions including in Georgia, Turkey, Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. In 2007, Matteo played an important role in pressing for the adoption of the first UN General Assembly resolution calling for a world moratorium of capital executions, and for assisting various countries in adhering to the Rome statute that established the International Criminal Court. In 2008, Matteo was elected Chairperson of the Italian Parliamentary Intergroup for Tibet.

Alex Neve is the Secretary General of *Amnesty International Canada*. He is a lawyer, with a Master's Degree in International Human Rights Law from the University of Essex in the United Kingdom, and undergraduate commerce and law degrees from Dalhousie. He has practiced law in Toronto, privately and in a community legal aid clinic, primarily in the areas of refugee and immigration law. He has taught international human rights and refugee law at Osgoode Hall Law School in Toronto and has been affiliated with the Centre for Refugee Studies at York University. Prior to taking up his current position as Secretary General of Amnesty International Canada, he served as a Member of Canada's Immigration and Refugee Board. He is an Officer of the Order of Canada.

Participant list (alphabetical)

Parliamentarians:

David Anderson, CPC, Cypress Hills – Grasslands, SK
Denis Blanchette, NDP, Louis – Hébert, QC
Ken Boshcoff (former MP and PFT member)

Alexandre Boulerice, NDP, Rosemont – La Petite Patrie, QC
Irwin Cotler, LPC, Mount Royal, QC
Joe Daniel, CPC, Don Valley East, ON
Patty Loveridge (representing MP Bruce Hyer), GPC, Thunder Bay - Superior North, ON
Wayne Marston, NDP, Hamilton East – Stoney Creek, ON

- Tom Allen, Legislative Assistant

Pat Martin, NDP, Winnipeg Centre, MA
Pierre Nantel, NDP, Longueuil – Pierre-Boucher, QC
Peggy Nash, NDP, Parkdale – High Park, ON

- Tenzin Tekan, Constituency Assistant

Peter Stoffer, NDP, Sackville – Eastern Shore, NS
David Sweet, CPC, Ancaster – Dundas – Flamborough – Westdale, ON
Bernard Trottier, CPC, Etobicoke – Lakeshore, ON
John Williamson, CPC, New Brunswick Southwest, NB

Observers:

Eva Cirnu, Canada Tibet Committee
Herb Davis, Parliamentary Friends of Tibet
Tsering Dhundup, Canadian Tibetan Association of Ontario CTAO
Con DiNino, Canada Tibet Committee
Tenzin Khedup, Canadian Tibetan Association of Ontario
Samphe Lhalungpa, Canada Tibet Committee
Li Xue Jiang, Xinhua News Agency
Katelyn Lloyd, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development
Carole Samdup, Canada Tibet Committee
Floriane Tsering, Canada Tibet Committee
Kunga Tsering, Canadian Friends of Tibet
Norbu Tsering, Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile
Doma Tsoh, Canadian Friends of Tibet
Tsering Tsomo, Canadian Tibetan Association of Ontario CTAO

Organization profiles

The *Parliamentary Friends of Tibet* was formed in 1990 as an all-party group of MPs and Senators who were concerned about the deteriorating human rights situation in Tibet. The PFT seeks to strengthen Canadian government support for a just and principled policy approach to the issue of Tibet. The PFT supports His Holiness the Dalai Lama's goal of achieving genuine

autonomy for Tibetans through negotiations with the People's Republic of China using non-violent strategies. The current Chair of the PFT is Bernard Trottier (CPC). Co-chairs are Peggy Nash (NDP) and Irwin Cotler (LPC).

Created in 1987, the *Canada Tibet Committee* is a national organization with representation across Canada. The CTC defends and promotes human rights and democratic freedoms of the Tibetan people. The CTC monitors developments inside Tibet and builds public awareness in Canada through its outreach activities including a weekly news digest which is circulated to Members of Parliament. www.tibet.ca

The mission of the *Canadian Tibetan Association of Ontario* is to promote the rights of all individuals, in particular, those of Tibetan Canadians and to encourage their full and equal participation in Canadian society; to create an environment in this country in which the rights of individuals are fully recognized and protected; to promote understanding and cooperation between Tibetan Canadians and all other ethnic, cultural and racial groups; to encourage and develop in persons of Tibetan descent, a desire to know and respect their history and culture. www.ctao.org

The *Canadian Friends of Tibet* is a community organization that fosters understanding and cooperation between the Tibetan-Canadian community and all Canadians. <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Canadian-Friends-of-Tibet/1537253453175861>

The *Tibetan Cultural Association of Quebec* is a community-based organization that preserves and promotes Tibetan culture in the Province of Quebec. The TCAQ supports the Tibetan cause through its public advocacy projects. <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Lassociation-culturelle-tib%C3%A9taine-du-Qu%C3%A9bec-TCAQ/344947378985729>

The *Tibetan Woman's Association of Ontario* organizes community events in support of advocacy for the Tibetan cause. It is a chapter of the international TWA network founded on March 12, 1959 in Tibet – a day when thousands of Tibetan women marched in the streets of Lhasa. <https://www.facebook.com/TibetanWomensAssociationofOntario>