



Briefing Note

## Middle Way Approach • Genuine Autonomy for Tibetan People

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*“To resolve the issue of Tibet, each and every provision of autonomy as stipulated in the Constitution of the PRC and its Law on National Regional Autonomy should be genuinely implemented by the Chinese Government and the entire Tibetan people must be brought under a single autonomous administration. Moreover, non-violence should be the only means by which to achieve these objectives. These are the inviolable principles of the Middle Way.”*

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### The Middle Way Approach • Nature and History

The *Middle Way Approach for Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan People* (“Umaylam” in Tibetan) is a policy conceived by His Holiness the Dalai Lama in 1974, in an effort to engage the Chinese government in dialogue and find a peaceful way to protect the unique Tibetan culture and identity. It is a policy adopted democratically through a series of discussions held over many decades by the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) and the Tibetan people. It is a win-win proposition, which straddles the middle path between the status quo and independence – one that categorically rejects the present

repressive and colonial policies of the Chinese government towards the Tibetan people while not seeking separation from the People’s Republic of China.

To this day, His Holiness the Dalai Lama remains steadfast in his endorsement of this approach as a realistic and pragmatic solution to the grave and now-urgent problems faced inside Tibet. The policy’s first accomplishment came with the establishment of direct contact between Dharamshala and Beijing when Deng Xiaoping said in 1979 that, “apart from independence, all issues can be discussed.”

Four fact-finding delegations visited Tibet from 1979 - 1985. Two exploratory delegations from Dharamshala met the highest Chinese leadership in Beijing in 1982 and 1984, and there were official contacts between Dharamshala and Beijing till August 1993.

**Meanwhile, since 1987, His Holiness the Dalai Lama had presented the Middle Way Approach in a range of forums around the world – including the U.S. Congress and the European Parliament – hoping to once again draw the Chinese leadership into discussions.** Dialogue resumed in earnest in 2002, and led to a total of nine rounds of talks. During the 7<sup>th</sup> round of talks in 2008 – the year in which unprecedented and widespread protests broke out across Tibet – the Chinese government asked the Tibetan leadership to put in writing the nature of the autonomy it sought. The *Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan People* was presented during the 8<sup>th</sup> round of talks in 2008.

The Chinese government expressed a number of concerns and objections to the *Memorandum*. To address these, during the 9<sup>th</sup> and last round of talks in January 2010 the Tibetan leadership presented the *Note on the Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan People*. The *Memorandum* and the *Note* elaborate how genuine autonomy for the Tibetan people

would operate within the framework of the People's Republic of China: its constitution, sovereignty and territorial integrity, its 'three adherences'<sup>1</sup> and the hierarchy and authority of the Chinese Central Government (CCG). The *Note* further addresses specific concerns raised by the Chinese government in respect to: the Form of Single Administration; Political, Social and Economic systems; Public Security; Regulation of Population Migration; Language; and Religion. The *Note* also provides a commitment that His Holiness the Dalai Lama is prepared to issue a formal statement to allay the CCG's "doubts and concerns as to his position and intention on matters" contained in the *Memorandum*.

There has been no dialogue with the Chinese since 2010. Despite this, the Tibetan leadership remains steadfast in its commitment to the *Middle Way Approach for Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan People* and to finding a lasting solution through dialogue between the envoys of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the representatives of the Chinese leadership.

■ Please see separate *Timeline* for a more detailed history of the **Middle Way Approach**.

<sup>1</sup> The 'three adherences' as stipulated by the Central Government are: (1) the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party; (2) Socialism with Chinese characteristics; and (3) the Regional National Autonomy system.

## What are Tibetan people seeking through the Middle Way Approach?

**Tibetans are seeking a form of self-governance, which would allow them to meet their basic needs but not challenge the unity and stability of the People's Republic of China.** They are seeking a form of autonomy where Tibetan people share the customs and value system, language, way of life and geography. Uniting them under a single administrative unit would be a more efficient and effective form of governance than the existing structure where Tibetans are divided into the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and neighbouring provinces with a Chinese majority, i.e. Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu and Yunnan.

The Chinese authorities have claimed that it is the Tibetan leadership's intention to expel "all Chinese" from Tibetan areas. In fact, the *Memorandum* clearly articulates that this is not the case: "Our intention is not to expel non-Tibetans. Our concern is the induced mass movement of primarily Han, but also some other nationalities, into many Tibetan areas, which in turn marginalises the native

Tibetan population." The *Memorandum* calls for the Tibetan areas to have a Tibetan majority for the preservation and promotion of the unique Tibetan identity. The Tibetan population in the People's Republic of China is estimated at 6.2 million (6th National Population Census of PRC) which is approximately 0.47% of China's total population.

**A Tibetan regional administration would govern the protection and promotion of the 11 Basic Needs of Tibetans, which encompass the following:**

*language, culture, religion, education, environmental protection, utilisation of natural resources, economic development and trade, public health, public security, regulation on population migration and cultural, educational and religious exchanges with other countries.*

This is consistent with both the National Regional Autonomy Law and the Constitution of the People's Republic of China.

## Position of His Holiness the Dalai Lama

**In 2011, His Holiness the Dalai Lama devolved his political responsibilities to the elected Tibetan leadership – the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) under the leadership of the Sikyong, the**

**democratically-elected Tibetan political leader.** As stated in the *Memorandum*, His Holiness the Dalai Lama has made it clear on numerous occasions that he will not hold any political position in Tibet. As symbol of

Tibetan unity and identity, he is a beacon of hope for the Tibetan people. Tibetan people place their hope in his spiritual leadership as the person most trusted with bringing about a peaceful resolution to the situation inside Tibet. As a Tibetan, he remains deeply

committed to lending whatever support is needed to reach a resolution to the current impasse and remains a staunch and unwavering advocate of the Middle Way Approach.

## Widespread support for the Middle Way Approach

**The Tibetan leadership believes the Middle Way Approach is the most viable solution to the current urgent situation inside Tibet.** It is also the approach which has enjoyed the strongest international support. Many national governments have officially stated their support for dialogue between the envoys of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the representatives of the Chinese leadership, including the U.S., E.U., Britain, France, Germany, Australia and New Zealand. In the past two years alone, resolutions, motions and statements of support for dialogue have been passed in parliaments in the U.S., E.U., France, Italy, Japan, Australia, Brazil and Luxembourg, amongst others.

**The Middle Way Approach gains more support every year from the Chinese community. Some of the most respected Chinese intellectuals and artists endorse the policy.** These include Liu Xiaobo, the imprisoned Nobel Laureate who was one of the co- authors of an open letter in 2008

that expressed support for His Holiness the Dalai Lama's peace initiatives. Since then, more than 1,000 articles and opinion pieces have been written by Chinese scholars and writers supporting dialogue to resolve the issue of Tibet. These include a report by the Beijing-based legal NGO, the Gongmeng Constitutional Initiative, describing the grievances of the Tibetan people and calling for policy review. In 2012, 82 Chinese NGOs based in 15 countries sent a petition to the United Nations, the E.U., various parliaments and governments, exhorting them to "urge the Chinese government to start negotiations as soon as possible."

Other Chinese intellectuals who support the Middle Way Approach include Wang Lixiong, a well-known writer, Zhang Boshu of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and a constitutional expert, Ran Yunfei of Sichuan Literary Periodical, Yu Haocheng, a senior member of the Communist Party and legal expert based in Beijing, Su Shaozhi, former economist at the Chinese Academy

of Social Sciences and Yan Jiaqi, a close aide of former CCP Party Secretary, Zhao Ziyang.

**To put the Middle Way Approach into effect, global leaders who have called for dialogue** include U.S. President Barack Obama, former U.S. President, George Bush, High Commissioner for UN Human Rights, Navi Pillay, High Representative for E.U. on Foreign Affairs/Security Policy and Vice-President of European Commission, Lady Catherine Ashton, former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, former French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, Canadian Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, Australian Prime Minister, Tony Abbot, former Australian Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd and Taiwanese President, Ma Ying-jeou.

**After President Barack Obama's meeting with His Holiness the Dalai Lama on 16 July 2011 and again on 21 February 2014,** the White House applauded "the Dalai Lama's commitment to non-violence and dialogue with China and his pursuit of the Middle Way Approach," and encouraged "direct dialogue to resolve long-standing differences", saying "that a dialogue that produces results would be positive for China and Tibetans."

**The Middle Way Approach has been supported by a number of Nobel Peace Laureates** such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, Elie Wiesel of the U.S.,

Jody Williams of the U.S., Leymah Gbowee of Liberia, Lech Walesa of Poland, Shirin Ebadi of Iran, Rigoberta Menchú Tum of Guatemala, José Ramos Horta of East Timor, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel of Argentina, Mairead Corrigan Maguire of Ireland, and Betty Williams of the U.K.

**In an open letter to Chinese President Hu Jintao in 2012, 12 Nobel peace laureates wrote:** "The people of Tibet wish to be heard. They have long sought meaningful autonomy, and chosen negotiation and friendly help as their means of attaining it. The Chinese government should hear their voices, understand their grievances and find a non-violent solution. That solution is offered by our friend and brother His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who has never sought separatism, and has always chosen a peaceful path. We strongly urge the Chinese government to seize the opportunity he provides for a meaningful dialogue. Once formed, this channel should remain open, active and productive. It should address issues that are at the heart of the current tension, respecting the dignity of the Tibetan people and the integrity of China."

**Prominent leaders inside Tibet who have supported the Middle Way Approach include the late Panchen Lama, who openly expressed support for the policy.** The late Ngapo Ngawang Jigme, a former minister of the Tibetan government in Tibet, urged

the Chinese government to implement regional autonomy in Tibet as promised in its 17-Point Agreement.<sup>2</sup>

**The late Baba Phuntsok Wangyal, a senior Tibetan official of the Chinese Communist Party,** stated that “the Dalai Lama’s Middle Way Approach of seeking only a meaningful autonomy for Tibet rather than independence, in the present historical context, is an expression of the great responsibility he takes in giving serious thoughts over the fundamental interests, future and fate of Tibet and the Tibetans as a whole. It also shows that he takes great responsibility in understanding the issues

concerning both sides and in carefully studying the changing circumstances. Furthermore, it is a thinking that is based on reality and foresight.”

**Tibetan leaders** such as Dorje Tseten, a senior Tibetan Communist leader and former director of the Tibetology Research Centre in Beijing, Sangye Yeshe (Tian Bao), a veteran Tibetan Communist leader, Tashi Tsering, a professor of English at Tibet University in Lhasa, and Yangling Dorjee, a senior Tibetan Communist leader, support the unification of all the Tibetan people under a single administration.

## The Way Forward

**The Tibetan administration is seeking the support of the Chinese community and the wider international community to encourage the Chinese government to resume dialogue in a spirit of reconciliation, and mindful of the many benefits to both sides that would stem from genuine autonomy.**

The Tibetan leadership believes the Central Chinese Government can no longer defend its position that Tibetans in Tibet are satisfied with the current Chinese policies. Therefore

the Tibetan people must be granted a genuine say in their own affairs in order for them to live in harmony. Through the Middle Way Approach, the People’s Republic of China can ensure regional peace and stability by having a legitimate presence. Internationally, it also stands to gain by improving its image in the minds and hearts of people around the world, while at the same time protect its territorial integrity and sovereignty. ●

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<sup>2</sup> *The Tibetan government was coerced to sign the agreement in 1951 under the threat of military invasion. In 1959, His Holiness the Dalai Lama repudiated the agreement following China’s failure to abide by its commitment.*