



## Frequently Asked Questions about the Middle Way Approach

### Genuine Autonomy for Tibetan People

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#### 1. What is the Middle Way Approach?

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.

It is a pragmatic position that safeguards the vital interests of concerned parties: for Tibetans, the protection and preservation

of their identity and dignity; and for China, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the motherland. It has enabled direct contact between the envoys of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Chinese government in 1979 making possible, for four fact-finding delegations of exile leadership, to travel extensively within Tibet and the holding of exploratory talks in 1982 and 1984. From 2002 to 2010, nine rounds of formal talks and one informal meeting took place between the envoys of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and representatives of the Chinese leadership.

#### 2. Why seek autonomy?

The Tibetan leadership believes that genuine autonomy is a pragmatic, win-win solution for Tibet and China. In today’s interdependent world, countries cannot live in isolation without depending on others. Many countries are now foregoing some of their individual sovereign rights by joining federations such as the European Union.

### 3. What form will genuine autonomy for Tibet take?

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. Tibetans are seeking a form of autonomy where they share customs and the same 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 claim that it is the Tibetan leadership's intention to expel "all Chinese" from Tibetan areas. In fact, the *Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan People* 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 marginalizes the native Tibetan population." The *Memorandum* calls for 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 (Source: 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.

### 4. Does the Middle Way Approach enjoy widespread support from the Tibetan people? If so how have the Tibetan people shown their support?

The Middle Way Approach was adopted as the official policy of the Central Tibetan Administration based on the result of majority approval in a series of meetings and opinion polls held between 1988 and 2010. This was done through a democratic process by directly soliciting the views of

the delegates representing the Tibetan public. Again during an opinion poll in 1997, 64% of the total opinions received expressed that there was no need to hold a referendum, and that they would support whichever policy His Holiness the Dalai Lama pursued. Reflecting the outcome of the opinion poll, the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile adopted a unanimous resolution in favor of the Middle Way Approach on 18 September 1997. Similarly, more than 80% of opinions collected during the six-day First Special General Meeting held in November 2008 also reiterated the support for the Middle Way Approach. Finally, in March 2010, a parliamentary resolution in support of the policy was unanimously adopted again. Thus, the Middle Way Approach has the support of an overwhelming majority of Tibetans.

### **5. How did Tibetans inside Tibet voice their support for the Middle Way Approach?**

Though it is impossible to openly collect opinions from inside Tibet, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Central Tibetan Administration made every possible effort to incorporate their views in the decision-making process. For instance, newly-arrived Tibetans from Tibet were invited to participate in a special political meeting held in June 1988. Similarly, opinions from inside Tibet were also collected during an opinion poll for the referendum in 1995-96.

Both written and verbal suggestions were solicited from Tibetans inside Tibet for the First Special General Meeting in November 2008. The majority of these opinions were in support of the Middle Way Approach.

Moreover, the Middle Way Approach has enjoyed support from the highest-ranking Tibetan leaders and intellectuals inside Tibet which include the late Panchen Lama, who openly expressed support for the Middle Way Approach, as well as senior leaders such as the late Ngapo Ngawang Jigme, Baba Phuntsok Wangyal, Dorjee Tseten, Sangye Yeshe (Tian Bao), Tashi Tsering and Yangling Dorjee.

### **6. Does the Middle Way Approach advocate only cultural autonomy?**

No, the Middle Way Approach advocates self-governance. It is not limited to cultural autonomy. The Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan People spells out 11 areas of self-governance under the section titled "Basic Needs of Tibetans" with the application of a single administration for the Tibetan Nationality in the People's Republic of China.

The "Basic Needs of Tibetans" are the following:

- 1) Language
- 2) Culture
- 3) Religion
- 4) Education

- 5) Environmental Protection
- 6) Utilisation of Natural Resources
- 7) Economic Development and Trade
- 8) Public Health
- 9) Public Security
- 10) Regulation on Population Migration
- 11) Cultural, Educational and Religious Exchanges with Other Countries

## **7. Under genuine autonomy for the Tibetan people, what would be the future of non-Tibetans living in the present-day Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and neighbouring Tibetan-inhabited areas?**

As stated in the *Note on the Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan People*: “It is not our intention to expel non-Tibetans who have permanently settled in Tibet and have lived there and grown up there for a considerable time.” Tibetans’ concern is the induced mass movement of primarily Han, but also some other nationalities, into many Tibetan areas, which in turn marginalizes the native Tibetan population and threatens Tibet’s fragile environment. The proposal to regulate the transient population is in keeping with the Chinese constitution and Article 43 of the Law on Regional National Autonomy which states: “In accordance

with legal stipulations, the organs of self-government of national autonomous shall work out measures for control of the transient population.”

## **8. Will genuine autonomy for the Tibetan people benefit environmental preservation in Tibet?**

Tibet, with its fragile ecosystem, is the prime source of Asia’s great rivers. Today, Tibet’s traditional environment is suffering irreparable damage. “Environmental Protection” and “Utilisation of Natural Resources” are the 5th and 6th Basic Needs of Tibetans spelled out in the Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan People. The rapid cultural assimilation, destruction of environment and excessive exploitation of natural resources are key reasons for the CTA to intensify its push for genuine autonomy for the Tibetan people. Every year, evidence grows of Chinese environmental and development policies which prove unsustainable, thus causing long-term environmental damage. This includes the damming of river systems which reach as far as India, Pakistan, Burma, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and mainland China – thus affecting almost half of the world’s population.

## 9. Why does the CTA pursue the Middle Way Approach and what are its accomplishments so far?

The Middle Way Approach has succeeded in many ways, including allowing contact with Tibetans in Tibet and multiple rounds of dialogue with the Chinese leadership. It is mainly due to the policy that the Tibet issue continues to enjoy overwhelming support not only from the international community but also from the Chinese people.

The Middle Way Approach enabled direct contact between the Tibetan leadership and the Chinese government in 1979, which led to four fact-finding delegations of exiled Tibetans who travelled extensively within Tibet. The fact-finding delegations visited Lhasa, Shigatse, Lhokha, Kongpo Nyingtri, Sakya, Lhuntse, Tsona, Tsethang, Gyantse, Choekhorgyal, Sangagchoeling and YartokNakartse in U-Tsang; Kanlho, Siling, Golok, Malho, Ngaba and Zoege in Amdo; Nagchu, Chamdo, Dege, Kardze, Nyarong, Gyalthang and Markham in Kham. In 1982 and 1984, Chinese leaders met exploratory delegations from Dharamshala for talks in Beijing. Between 2002 and 2010, nine rounds of formal talks and one informal meeting took place between the envoys of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and representatives of the Chinese leadership. To date, thousands of students, monks

and nuns have been able to study in exile, contributing to the preservation of Tibetan culture and religion.

The Middle-Way Approach enables many governments to support a solution-oriented Tibet policy and help them raise the grave and urgent problems of Tibet in their dialogue with China. After President Barack Obama's meeting with His Holiness the Dalai Lama in July 2011, 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 the relevant parties to engage in "direct dialogue to resolve long-standing differences." The Middle Way Approach has enjoyed the strongest international support as the most viable option to address the current situation inside Tibet. Many national governments have officially stated their support for the Middle Way Approach, including the U.S., India, Britain, France, Germany, Australia and New Zealand. In the past two years alone, declarations, resolutions and motions of support for the Middle Way Approach have been passed in parliaments in the U.S., European Union, France, Italy, Japan, Australia, Brazil and Luxembourg, amongst others.

The Middle Way Approach gains more support every year from the Chinese community including intellectuals and

artists such as Liu Xiaobo, the imprisoned Nobel Laureate, who was a 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 European Union, various parliaments and governments, exhorting them to "urge the Chinese government to start negotiations as soon as possible." The Middle Way Approach has received the support of a number of leading Chinese intellectuals including Wang Lixiong, a well-known writer, Zhang Boshu of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and 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, close aide of former CCP Party Secretary Zhao Ziyang.

To put into effect the Middle Way Approach, 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 European Union Foreign Affairs/ Security Policy/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 Stephan 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, 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 and 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 sent by a group of 12 Nobel peace laureates in 2012, they said: “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.”

### **10. Are Tibetans seeking a “Greater Tibet” and a “High Degree of Autonomy” as alleged by the Chinese government?**

Our aspiration to seek genuine autonomy has been made clear in writing not just to the Chinese government but also to the international community. The Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy for the Tibetan people and its Note are in the public domain. Anyone can verify whether

Chinese government’s allegations are true. The Central Tibetan Administration is committed to the Middle Way Approach, which neither seeks “Greater Tibet” nor a “high degree of autonomy”, but genuine autonomy for all Tibetan people under a single administration. This is consistent with both the National Regional Autonomy Law and the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China.

The People’s Republic of China has intentionally formulated the word “Greater Tibet” to mislead the international community into believing that Tibetans are seeking separation or demarcation of Tibetan areas. The CTA does not use the term “Greater Tibet”. The three traditional provinces of U-Tsang, Kham and Amdo have always been essential parts of traditional Tibet which cover the entire Tibetan plateau. They share not just the same geography and topography but also culture, language and religion. Division of Tibet into several provinces of China is a clear violation of Chinese laws and of Article 4 of the Constitution which recognizes the right of minority nationalities to practice regional autonomy “in the areas where they live in concentrated communities” and “to set up organ of self-government for the exercise of power of autonomy.” 99% of Uyghurs in China live in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and 95% of Zhuangs live in Guangxi Zhuang

Autonomous Region. Tibetans living in one concentrated community are divided into different provinces with less than 50% in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) while the majority is incorporated into neighbouring Chinese provinces as autonomous prefectures and counties.

Tibet constituting one-fourth of China is not a recent political creation but a natural outcome of Tibetans inhabiting the Tibetan plateau for thousands of years. The fact that Tibet constitutes one-fourth of China should not be a concern for the Chinese government because one sixth of China is already established as Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and one-eighth as Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. Moreover, genuine autonomy for all Tibetans does not only conform to Tibet's geographical reality, but conforms to its administrative needs, all of which aims for the actual implementation of Chinese laws in these areas to empower Tibetans to become masters of their own affairs.

Having all Tibetans, who share the same culture, same level and mode of economic development and even the same environment of the Tibetan Plateau, live within a single administrative unit will be an efficient and effective form of governance rather than dividing them into TAR and four Chinese provinces of

Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu and Yunnan with Chinese majority.

Similarly, the Chinese government has unleashed a massive propaganda to project that Tibetans are seeking "high degree of autonomy." In reality our aspiration is for the Chinese government to implement the provisions of national regional autonomy as enshrined in the PRC constitution. Apart from this we have never talk about high or low degree of autonomy.

### **11. Does the Middle Way Approach seeking genuine autonomy for Tibetan people contradict the Chinese Constitution?**

No, it does not contradict the Chinese Constitution. The Middle Way Approach, which seeks genuine autonomy for the Tibetan people under a single administration, is entirely in accordance with the constitutional principle contained in Article 4, which is also reflected in the National Regional Autonomy Law (Article 2), that "regional autonomy is practiced in areas where people of minority nationalities live in concentrated communities."

The Law on Regional National Autonomy (LRNA) describes regional national autonomy as the "basic policy adopted by the Communist Party of China for the solution of the national question in China" and explains



its meaning and intent in its preface:

*“The minority nationalities, under the unified state leadership, practice regional autonomy in areas where they live in concentrated communities and set up organs of self-governance for the exercise of the power of autonomy. Regional national autonomy embodies the state’s full respect for and guarantee of the right of the minority nationalities to administer their internal affairs and its adherence to principle of equality, unity and common prosperity of all nationalities.”*

Therefore, these allegations are baseless. The fact is that Chinese government is not willing to implement or accept the rights given to the minorities in its own constitution.

If Chinese government truly believes that Tibetan aspiration is to seek genuine autonomy is against the constitution, it should be able to explain how and why it is against the constitution rather than making mere allegations. ●