



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

SDIR • NUMBER 069 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, February 26, 2013

—

Chair

Mr. Scott Reid

Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Tuesday, February 26, 2013

•(1305)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC)): Welcome to the 69th meeting of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. Today is Tuesday, February 26, 2013.

[English]

Today's hearing is televised. That means the fixed cameras here can record this.

I was asked by one of our members whether we could seek unanimous consent to have one other camera take film footage from a fixed angle. Is that acceptable?

Voices: Yes.

The Chair: All right, good. We'll do that.

Colleagues, as a subcommittee we undertook to pursue the important issue of the self-immolations that have been going on in Tibet over the past few years. This was discussed by this committee in camera, but I am giving away no secrets when I say this is a tragic series of circumstances that involve at least 100 fatalities so far. More than half of all the politically motivated self-immolations in the world relate to the situation in Tibet.

Based on that concern, we agreed to a series of hearings, and we invited the Tibetan government-in-exile, or the Central Tibetan Administration, to send representatives. They have done us the honour of sending their leader, their Sikyong, Dr. Lobsang Sangay, to be our witness today.

In the interest of time, I'm going to request that we go directly to testimony from Dr. Sangay. Upon completion of the testimony, we will turn to questions from members of the committee, following our usual format.

Dr. Sangay, I invite you to begin your testimony.

Dr. Lobsang Sangay (Sikyong, Central Tibetan Administration): Thank you very much to the chair and the members of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights. It's a great honour and privilege to be in your presence and to testify about the situation in Tibet on behalf of the Tibetan people.

I would like to extend deep appreciation to Canada for awarding His Holiness the Dalai Lama the honorary citizenship of Canada. His

Holiness the Dalai Lama sends his good wishes. I also want to thank Prime Minister Stephen Harper for meeting with His Holiness the Dalai Lama and for being an advocate of the Tibet issue.

We also welcome the statement issued by the Honourable Foreign Minister John Baird on December 14 on self-immolation, particularly encouraging the Chinese government to enter into dialogue with His Holiness the Dalai Lama and his representatives. The Tibet administration maintains that we have to solve the issue of Tibet peacefully through dialogue. The "middle way" is the official policy that seeks genuine autonomy within the framework of the Chinese constitution.

I'd also like to extend our appreciation to the Honourable Minister Jason Kenney and the government for allowing visas to 1,000 Tibetans in the state of Arunachal Pradesh in India to migrate to Canada. There are 900 Tibetans so far, and we hope that the first phase of Tibetans will be coming to Canada. Canada has been a very generous host to 5,000 or so Tibetans. Since 1971 many Tibetans have come here and settled; they have been, by and large, law-abiding residents and citizens of Canada, for which we are very grateful.

On the topic of self-immolation, I'm sad to inform you that the number has increased and keeps increasing. Now we have 107 cases of self-immolation. Just two days ago, a few more Tibetans committed self-immolation. It all started in 2009. There was one case of self-immolation in 2009 inside Tibet. In 2011 there were 13 cases of self-immolation. Unfortunately, the majority of self-immolation took place last year. There were 28 cases of self-immolation in the month of November alone, when the Chinese Communist Party had its 18th party congress meeting in Beijing.

This year, seven self-immolations have taken place, and their universal slogan or aspiration is that His Holiness the Dalai Lama return to Tibet. Canada has witnessed His Holiness visit here, and thousands of Canadians have met him and heard him, but that right is denied to Tibetans inside Tibet. Hence, the universal aspiration of Tibetans inside Tibet is to have His Holiness the Dalai Lama return to Tibet.

The second aspiration is to have freedom for Tibetans. We fully recognize and appreciate that democracy, freedom, and rule of law are three core principles of Canada and are also enshrined in the Canadian Constitution. We would like to have that freedom that Canadians enjoy, and that seems to be—and that is—the aspiration of Tibetans inside Tibet, as reflected in the slogans of self-immolators.

As far as Tibetan Buddhism is concerned, 108 is an auspicious number. Unfortunately, if there's one more self-immolation, it will be very unfortunate and inauspicious in the history of Tibet, because this phenomenon of self-immolation is a new one, a tragic one, and a sad one.

● (1310)

The Tibetan administration and I have made repeated calls to Tibetans inside Tibet not to resort to self-immolation. We categorically discourage drastic actions, including self-immolation, because as human beings we really don't want to see anyone die the way Tibetans are doing inside Tibet. As a Buddhist or a person of faith, or non-faith, we pray for all those who have died, including self-immolators, and as Tibetans, we support the aspirations of Tibetan people inside Tibet, including self-immolators.

On their behalf I am here today in this august body to highlight and share with you the sufferings and aspirations of the Tibetan people so that your committee and through your committee the Canadian Parliament, which has stood with us for all these years, will continue to stand with us.

Unfortunately, instead of finding solutions, the Chinese government is resorting to the blame game. They are blaming us as the instigators. If you look at the blame they have laid out before us, first they say the self-immolators are crazy; they've lost their minds. When that did not work, they started to say it was the jobless, hopeless people who were resorting to self-immolation. Then when self-immolation escalated, they said this was instigated from outside, by us, and there is not even a shred of evidence to support that allegation. We welcome Beijing or the Government of China to come to Dharamsala to see our files and look for evidence. I can categorically say that the allegation made by the Chinese government is baseless, and they are welcome to come to Dharamsala and find out if there is any evidence.

The blame and the solution lie with Beijing. The causes of the self-immolations are the occupation of Tibet and the repression of Tibetans. Tibetans are saying occupation is unacceptable and repression is unbearable. Political oppression, economic marginalization, environmental destruction, cultural assimilation, and denial of religious freedom are the reasons why Tibetans are forced to resort to self-immolation. There is no space for any form of protest; there is no freedom of speech for Tibetans. Hence, tragically and sadly, they are resorting to self-immolation.

Having said all that, we do believe, as I stated at the beginning of my statement, that we have to find the solution through peaceful means. Tibetans have subscribed to non-violence and democracy for these many decades. We will continue to subscribe to these principles. We believe in them, and we seek the support of friends like you who believe in democracy and non-violence, who believe that the Chinese government ought to enter into dialogue to solve the issue of Tibet peacefully. This is what we believe, and with your support we will continue to speak out for Tibetans inside Tibet.

I really appreciate the members of Parliament, members of the committee who are here, who have been long-term friends of Tibet and the Tibetan people, and I urge you at this critical time of Tibet to be with us and know that you are on the right side of the cause. As we see around the world, justice ultimately prevails; it will prevail in

Tibet as well, and that will be partly because of your effort and support.

Thank you very much.

● (1315)

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Sangay.

We have enough time to have seven-minute rounds for questions and answers.

We begin with David Sweet.

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Dr. Sangay, it's good to see you, the Sikyong of the Tibetan people. Thank you very much for your testimony.

You mentioned that the solution rests with Beijing. These 107 self-immolations...that's an extraordinary number, and it's hard to fathom people lighting themselves in protest, and what they must have gone through to have that kind of motivation.

What has been the response of the People's Republic of China so far? Have they begun to soften their position? Do they have some kind of empathy towards what's going on?

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: Unfortunately, the Chinese government so far has resorted to the same old hardline policies. In fact, they passed a law criminalizing self-immolation, and with that law, they are punishing not just the self-immolators, but their family members and friends. Even those Tibetans who witness self-immolation, and who try to rescue the bodies of self-immolators, have been met with long-term imprisonment, up to 12 years. It's unfortunate that not only are they resorting to the blame game, but now they're criminalizing it. The courts are prosecuting not just the self-immolators but the family members and their friends, and even the witnesses who might want as a human gesture to rescue the body so that person can have a decent funeral. It's really sad that they have resorted to more hardline policies, rather than finding a peaceful, more reform-oriented policy to solve the issue of Tibet.

I would just like to add that if you look at the genesis of self-immolation, you might get an indication as to why Tibetans are resorting to such tragic acts. From 1987 to 1989, there was a series of protests in and around Lhasa, the capital city of Tibet. Sporadic protests happen on a regular basis everywhere in Tibet. Most of the protesters were arrested. If you shout "human rights" in the streets of Tibet, you get arrested, you go to prison, you are often tortured, and sometimes you disappear.

If you are caught with a picture of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, that's illegal. You're not supposed to have a picture of His Holiness the Dalai Lama; rather, you are supposed to insult the picture of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. You will be in deep trouble.

In 2006-2008, there was a series of protests, but most importantly in 2008, in a hundred different counties and all over Tibet, there were major uprisings and protests. The Chinese government again clamped down and arrested hundreds and thousands, put many of them behind bars; many were tortured and suffered for a long, long time. If you look at the genesis of protests and protestors, it seems Tibetans inside Tibet have concluded that if you are a protestor and you are caught...given the likelihood of being in prison for a long time and being tortured, given that the suffering will be enormous and it will last so long, it's better—and it's a sad conclusion—to self-immolate, because the chances of you not falling into the hands of Chinese authorities are higher. This is a fact, because some of the self-immolators have left their last wishes and a message with their friends, clearly saying, “I'm going to self-immolate, so make sure I don't fall into the hands of Chinese authorities.” Their fear of falling into the hands of Chinese authorities is so high, it's so scary, that they feel if they self-immolate they have to die.

If you look at the genesis of protests and the protestors, you understand why Tibetans are resorting to self-immolation, which is a tragic form of protest inside Tibet.

• (1320)

Mr. David Sweet: I asked you about the response of the People's Republic of China to these self-immolations. What has been the response of Tibetans inside Tibet to their brothers and sisters self-immolating? What is the feeling among Tibetans now?

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: From inside Tibet it's very difficult to know, because essentially Tibet has been shut down for foreign journalists, foreign tourists, and even Chinese tourism is discouraged. Having said that, you do get some hints and some information, where they say they understand the stance of the Tibet administration, that we discourage self-immolation. They also know it brings tears and sadness to His Holiness the Dalai Lama to have Tibetans self-immolate. They understand all that, but they say, what else can we do? They insist that with 107 self-immolators so far, not even a single Chinese person has been harmed; not even a single Chinese restaurant, hotel, or anything Chinese has been harmed or hurt. That's what they say: We are Buddhists; we cannot harm anybody, but the last resort we are left with is harming ourselves.

If you read the article in *The New York Times*, it says Tibetans travel from village to village in groups on their motorbikes, wherever the self-immolations are taking place, and they pray; they join the prayers. In that sense, the people seem to pray for the self-immolators and those who have died. It is generally known in Tibet about self-immolators, and the support, from a humanitarian point of view, is extended to the family members who are left behind.

Mr. David Sweet: Thank you, Dr. Sangay.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Marston, please.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Dr. Sangay. It's great to have you here again.

I read recently an article where you were quoted as saying that it would be good if Mr. Harper's government sent the new ambassador for religious freedoms to China to investigate human rights abuses

and abuses of religious freedoms. You also were quoted as saying that the growing business connections between Canada and China should not silence Canada's concern with human rights.

I just want it to be on record that I very much agree with that sentiment. It is a concern here. You'll know that recently our government gave the go-ahead for the Chinese company CNOOC to purchase into the Canadian oil and gas company Nexen. That particular company is like an extension of the Communist Chinese regime. It's basically operated by them.

I just returned from Burma last week. While there, I was told of situations of alleged human rights violations by the Chinese against the Burmese. I also understand, from speaking to you and others earlier, that similar abuses have taken place in Tibet.

Would you like to expand on that, Dr. Sangay?

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: We do believe that economic rights and trade are important, but human rights should be equally important. This is a request and also a hope, because Canada, as its Constitution says, regards democracy, freedom, and the rule of law as the core principles, the bedrock, of the Canadian Constitution and ethos. In that sense, trade is very important, but human rights should be equally important.

Speaking out about human rights is important, because if you look at the Tibet issue, from one perspective it is not a constitutional challenge, an institutional challenge, or a lack of political will on the part of the Chinese government. For example, we seek genuine autonomy within the framework of the Chinese constitution. But constitutionally, as per article 31, “one country, two systems” was established, and it was granted to Hong Kong and Macau. So constitutionally and institutionally, there is a system to address separate systems.

With regard to political will, the Chinese government has said again and again that they have.... I mean, at one time, the Chinese government was, and claimed to be, Marxist and Communist, and it has kind of shifted to a capitalist system. Now it's socialist with Chinese characteristics.

Similarly, on the issue of Tibet, they've also shown a willingness to address...and not just Tibet but Taiwan. They've shown a willingness to deal with Taiwan and recognize that the status quo is possible, meaning that China's government has shown political will whenever they want to address an issue.

Historically speaking, China had more differences with the British and Japanese than with Tibetans, yet they have normalized relations with Japan and Great Britain. They have shown that constitutionally and institutionally, they have the political will to address problems where they have to—and they have.

In that sense, Tibet is not yet addressed. The disturbing question is why not? Maybe from the Chinese government's point of view, the people of Hong Kong are Han Chinese, the people of Macau are Han Chinese, and the people of Taiwan.... But maybe people in Taiwan wouldn't agree; they call themselves Taiwanese.

So they might see them as Chinese, and as long as it's a "Chinese" problem, they will address it. When it becomes Tibetan, essentially the Chinese government seems to be saying, "You're not Chinese, hence we are not addressing your problem."

In that sense, it is all the more important that the human rights of Tibetan people be respected, because the Chinese government has shown in other areas, in other communities, the willingness to address this.

• (1325)

Mr. Wayne Marston: I'd like to go back to a meeting that you and I had a few weeks ago. You talked to me about why the self-immolations were happening, the kinds of pressures leading to a new....

You spoke to me at that time about the Chinese policy of cultural annihilation within Tibet by moving waves of Chinese people into Tibetans' autonomous region. Would you like to comment a bit further on that today for the benefit of the committee?

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: As far as cultural assimilation is concerned, if you take the example of the Tibetan language, at the university level, let's say in Tibet University in Lhasa, the capital city, the medium of instruction is Chinese, not Tibetan. At the high school and middle school level, the medium of instruction is Chinese, not Tibetan. Now even at the primary school level they're introducing Chinese as the medium of instruction.

In some areas of Tibet, even students are coming into the street and protesting and saying they want their language to be used in the classroom, because they are Tibetan after all and their language is very important. It's part of their identity, and to preserve their identity, language is very important. It's not just as the official language in offices, but even at school the Tibetan language is discouraged, and, for all practical purposes, even in government offices.

I have some friends who worked in the Chinese government in the Tibet Autonomous Region. If there are 20 staff members in one office, and if two of them are Chinese and 18 are Tibetans, when they convene their meeting they have to converse in Chinese. If a postman, let's say a nomad, wants to send a letter to his relatives in another village, he would have to write in Chinese, not in Tibetan.

When you impose that kind of system, discouraging your own identity, even language, you can clearly see the assimilation drive to essentially first dilute and then destroy the Tibetan culture is very much a part of the practice of the Chinese government.

Mr. Wayne Marston: That's why the cry for self-immolation is coming out of this country.

For the record, I believe Canada was on the right side of history when we chose to support His Holiness the Dalai Lama. When we decided to have that individual made a Canadian citizen, I was very proud.

I want to thank you for being here.

I suspect I'm nearly out of time, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Twelve seconds.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Twelve seconds? I think I'm out of time.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1330)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Marston.

We go now to Ms. Grewal, please.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

And thank you, Dr. Sangay, for your time and your presentation.

It has been recommended that the international community initiate a dialogue with the Chinese authorities; however, to have a constructive conversation, active participation by all members at the table is very necessary.

In your opinion, is a conversation with the Chinese authorities possible? Have they expressed any willingness to discuss their plans and motives in developing Tibet?

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: Until recently, a dialogue between the Chinese government and representatives of His Holiness the Dalai Lama had been going back and forth since the late seventies. Between 2002 and January of 2010, there were nine meetings between envoys of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and his Chinese counterpart, mainly the United Front, which is an extension of the Communist Party of China. So there were nine formal meetings, and they discussed all aspects of Tibet and how to address the issue.

The Tibetan side put forward the definition and explanation of what we mean by "genuine autonomy". A document called "Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy" is available, where you can see we have clearly illustrated what we mean by "genuine autonomy" and its correspondence to provisions in the Chinese constitution. Essentially what we're saying is if the Chinese government implements their own laws, we could take that as genuine autonomy. Unfortunately, the Chinese government refuses to address that document; in fact, through a press conference, they rejected it.

Since January 2010, there have been no meetings between the envoys of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and his Chinese counterpart. In June 2012, after two and a half years, two envoys submitted their resignation out of utter frustration because of lack of progress in the dialogue. Regretfully, I accepted their resignation. But at the same time, we issued a statement, whereby we made it very clear that we are ready to enter into dialogue any time, anywhere.

Also, most importantly, we have specified that we consider substance to be primary and process to be secondary. In that sense, if the Chinese government finds some technicalities or political issues as part of the complexities, we are willing to consider that. For us, what is most important is the substantive dialogue to solve the issue of Tibet. In that sense we are willing to consider options to the process so we can have substantive dialogue. Unfortunately, as of now, we have yet to have reciprocity from the Chinese government to enter into formal dialogue, and this is the state we are in.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Although self-immolation is the ultimate form of non-violent protest, do you think there are other effective means by which Tibetans can spread awareness about their current frustrating situation?

Furthermore, how can the Canadian government support Tibet in the pursuit of meaningful, peaceful dialogue with the Chinese authorities?

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: I really appreciate the question.

Continuing along the line of what I said earlier, we believe that dialogue is the best way to solve the issue of Tibet. The Canadian government, including the honourable foreign minister, is on the record urging the Chinese government to enter into dialogue. We request that his statement be consistently and persistently followed up with the Chinese government through the embassy in Beijing, so that the Chinese government is made aware that entering into dialogue is the best way to solve the issue.

We also welcome the establishment of the Office of Religious Freedom and the appointment of Ambassador Andrew Bennett. It would be a sound and a positive gesture on the part of the Canadian government to urge the Chinese government to allow Honourable Ambassador Andrew Bennett to visit Tibet and assess the situation, as far as religious freedom is concerned, because many of the latest self-immolators were monks and nuns. Religious freedom is one of the core issues that is forcing Tibetans to self-immolation. If Honourable Ambassador Andrew Bennett could visit Tibet and then investigate the situation and report to the Chinese government as to the realities, and also to the whole world and the Canadian population, we might find a way to address the issue of Tibet.

Also, perhaps Canadian Ambassador Guy Saint-Jacques could, like U.S. Ambassador Gary Locke, who visited some of the areas, also visit the Tibetan areas and assess the situation and inform the Chinese government as to the realities. I know that efforts are being made by the Canadian embassy to visit Tibetan areas, and this we appreciate, but I think that if persistently pushed, it could be followed up.

Also, UN Human Rights Commissioner Navi Pillay issued a very strong and unprecedented statement on self-immolations, but in particular the situation in Tibet. In that statement it has been made very clear that the United Nations and its agencies have made a dozen requests to visit Tibetan areas, and they have also made several recommendations on how to improve human rights conditions in Tibet.

I think China, as a member of the United Nations, should allow the UN human rights commissioner to visit Tibet, because China wants to be a member of the Human Rights Council and is applying

for membership of that council. If you are a UN member and you want to be a member of the Human Rights Council, you are expected to follow and implement the directives or the conditions of the United Nations. Accepting a visit by the United Nations human rights commissioner and a special rapporteur on religious freedom should be insisted upon, because China is bound by certain obligations as part of being a UN member.

● (1335)

The Chair: Thank you.

We go to the next questioner.

Professor Cotler, please.

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I also want to express our appreciation for your presence here today, Mr. Sangay, and also for your very eloquent and effective testimony before us.

You mentioned the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. She has expressed concern about the detentions and disappearances of Tibetans.

Do you have any appreciation of the number of those who have been arrested and detained since the protests of 2008 and of the extent of the repression at this point in Tibet?

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: It is very difficult to say because of lack of access to the Tibetan population and the areas. After 2008 there were several reports that hundreds—some say thousands—were arrested and put behind bars. Many of them met with long-term imprisonment. As UN Human Rights Commissioner Navi Pillay says, many have disappeared. That seems to be a reality.

So it is really difficult to put down numbers, but definitely it is in the hundreds, if not in the thousands. The Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, which is an NGO, has come out with a report recently, and also the Tibetan Department of Information and International Relations has come out with a report specifically on the 2008 uprising, which lists hundreds of political prisoners who are still in prison.

The unfortunate part is that many more who are unknown have disappeared. Until you have access to Tibetan areas, we will never know how many are in prison and how many have disappeared.

On the other hand, the Chinese government continues to say that anyone is welcome to come to Tibet to see for themselves the socialist paradise they have built for Tibetans. The spokesman for the foreign ministry insists that the door to dialogue is open. I often say that if they show us the door, we will enter that door. Similarly, they say you are welcome to come, but when members of the parliaments of different countries—and I hope members of the Canadian Parliament will also have a delegation to visit Tibet and will make the request through the Chinese embassy here in Ottawa to go to Tibet to assess the situation.... It is very likely that permission will be denied.

Because of these difficult circumstances it is almost impossible to give you exact numbers. But definitely it is high in numbers, for the population, because there are so many prisons that we know of. Even a gulag is reportedly in Tibetan areas. When there are so many prisons, you have to have many prisoners as well.

I'm sure there are many Tibetans who are facing very difficult experiences and going through enormous suffering in prisons in Tibet.

• (1340)

Hon. Irwin Cotler: I'm also wondering about the situation of the monks, because there's greater surveillance, if not outright control now, of the monks and of the nunneries in Tibet.

What is the situation now with the ability of Tibetans, let alone of the monks, to engage in religious expression or manifestations of their own religion?

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: I'm sorry to say it, but I have much sad news to inform you of.

As far as monasteries and nunneries are concerned, again the Chinese government has come out with a statement saying that they have established "democratic management committees" in 7,000 or so monasteries and nunneries in the Tibet Autonomous Region alone. Our definition of Tibet also includes the Amdo and Kham regions, which are part of Sichuan, Yunnan, Gansu, and Qinghai.

The democratic management committee in every monastery functions as an extension of the Communist Party, because the committee has Communist Party members. So you have Communist Party members who say that religion is poison, and they are atheists and are managing the monasteries. If any recruits come in, they are the ones who control their entry, and for any expulsion that has to be made, they are in charge.

Sadly, one of the reasons there are self-immolations is that photographs of His Holiness the Dalai Lama are banned. They are not only banned; when you are a monk in a monastery, you are shown the picture of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and are asked to condemn it—to spit on it, to stamp on it. If you don't, your loyalty is questioned, and then you are expelled, and worse, you might go to prison.

It's an irony that the committee is called "democratic management" but that its function is so undemocratic, so controlling that it's forcing Tibetans to stay out of the monastery, particularly Kirti Monastery, which was the main monastery and where a large number of self-immolations have taken place. From housing at one time a few thousand monks, it was reduced to a few hundred, because they expelled so many monks from the monastery. Then self-immolators, at least in 2011, started in Kirti Monastery and monasteries associated with Kirti Monastery.

So you can see direct causality between the democratic management committee controlling and expelling monks and the same monks going out into the streets and protesting.

As far as religious freedom is concerned, it is very repressive and very restrictive so far.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: This year is also the year that China will be served with the universal periodic review. Now, at the last universal periodic review, Canada made a whole series of recommendations, regrettably hardly any of which were accepted by China. What do you think might be some of the main recommendations that Canada could put forward with respect to China at this universal periodic review?

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: I think it's very important that Canada as well as the international community send a clear message to China that we would welcome its rise economically, but that as it is a member of the United Nations and also a growing power, we would like to see it be a responsible member of the international community, because with growth in stature, responsibility is very important. Canada and many democratic countries have accepted responsibilities and have contributed greatly by spreading or encouraging freedom everywhere in the world. So it is very important that the message be very clear.

For example, China wants to be a member of the Human Rights Council. In 2004 the Chinese government agreed to allow the special rapporteur on religious freedom of the United Nations to visit China and Tibet. They agreed. It's been nine years and the Chinese government has yet to fulfill its own pledge to allow the special rapporteur on religious freedom to visit China and Tibet. Now, I think it is very fair and it should be expected that a responsible member of the international community—the Chinese government—fulfill its own pledge, which was made nine years ago. Otherwise, if you allow a decade to pass and one pledge not to be fulfilled, for how many years will you wait, and for how many years will you have reviews and recommendations that will never be followed?

I think it is important that the international community insist that when the periodic review comes, we'll actually review it and make recommendations that will actually be followed by the Chinese government. Otherwise, a decade will pass, or two decades will pass, and then recommendations will keep coming and will not be implemented by the Chinese government.

• (1345)

The Chair: We go now to Mr. Sweet again.

Mr. David Sweet: Thank you very much, Chair.

As I listened to the testimony, I think it was Mr. Marston who used the term "cultural annihilation". Sikyong Sangay mentioned language as a very central aspect of ethnicity and cultural identity, and now we hear this testimony regarding the other thing that is central to the Tibetan identity, and that's Buddhism. Professor Cotler mentioned a record of those who were detained, and of course we're also very concerned about those who have disappeared as well. I mean those who not only have been detained, but also those who have been tortured and of course have eventually succumbed to it.

What is the state right now of the Panchen Lama, since you were talking about the identity of the people and about this disdainful practice that would be pushed upon him of spitting on the picture of His Holiness? Where is the Panchen Lama now?

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: As you all might know, Panchen Lama is the second most popular or well-known lama or incarnate lama in Tibetan Buddhism. The 10th Panchen Lama passed away, and then his reincarnation was recognized by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and mainly recommended by the Tashilhunpo monastery, which is the seat monastery of Panchen Lamas.

After His Holiness the Dalai Lama made the announcement of a young boy as the reincarnation of Panchen Lama, he disappeared, along with his family members. So until today we don't know exactly where he is. In his place the Chinese government imposed their candidate as the "Panchen Lama". It's almost like Fidel Castro picking the next pope and saying this is your lama. It did not just hurt the sentiments of the Tibetan people; it is also against Tibetan Buddhist practice to have a lama imposed on them by the Chinese government. Unfortunately, we don't know exactly where the Panchen Lama is. He is now in his early 20s. Gedhun Choekyi Nyima has disappeared.

To have the Panchen Lama released by the Chinese government will be a gesture on their part that they actually allow religious freedom; otherwise, his continued disappearance is a reflection of how Tibetan religious freedom is denied to Tibetans.

• (1350)

Mr. David Sweet: Dr. Sangay, you mentioned that constitutionally, institutionally, and politically, the People's Republic of China—and I haven't made that delineation, Mr. Chair, but I want to make sure now that we're talking about the Government of China and not the general peoples of China—have made accommodation for Macau and Hong Kong. If that rule is there in other instances, can you tell us why it is not there with Tibet? What is the resistance of the People's Republic of China regarding Tibet?

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: One interpretation is that, as I said earlier, maybe they see people in Hong Kong and Macau as Chinese, Hun Chinese, and Tibetans as not Chinese. There lies the contradiction. On the one hand, the official policy and statements are that Tibetans are part of the family. We are brothers and sisters; we are the same. On the other hand, they grant one constitutional system to Hong Kong and Macau, but yet deny it to Tibetans. It's one thing to say you are part of the family and it's another thing that you are denied a similar right.

There is an element of what I call Hun chauvinism in that sense. There is discrimination towards Tibetan people for sure.

Mr. David Sweet: To be clear, in His Holiness's third way, which is consistent with your leadership now, this is an autonomy within China, correct?

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: As we seek genuine autonomy within the People's Republic of China and within the framework of the Chinese constitution, it would mean that if the Chinese government implements their own laws we could take that as general autonomy. We are as reasonable and as moderate as one could be. That is on the table. Unfortunately, the Chinese government has yet to reciprocate in kind.

As I shared, we have invested in democracy and non-violence for many decades. I got elected through a democratic process, which is a bit unusual because it's an exile community. It was not a district-based, province-based, or a country-based election. It was a cross-continent-based election, so Tibetans in nearly 40-some countries voted in 2011 and elected me as their representative.

What we followed was very democratic. People from Alaska to Australia participated in the election. Our election commissioner was equally strict, as far as the election was concerned. The honourable David Sweet was also part of the observers who informally observed

and certified this to be a genuine election. March 20 is the final round of elections. People in Changtang, of Ladakh—that is 5,000 metres high. Nomads participated in the election. Local election officials carried ballot boxes on the backs of yaks and donkeys and walked up the mountain for several days in temperatures of minus forty degrees. Then the nomads came down from tents and voted in the election.

So Tibetans all across the world, including a fine Tibetan community in Canada, with the largest in Toronto, participated in that election. We also had rounds of debates among candidates so that people could have their choices made very clear.

Through that election process I was elected. In that sense, I do enjoy the democratic mandate of the Tibetan people. Also, as a matter of principle, we subscribe to non-violence as an uncompromising principle. We are invested in non-violence and democracy, which we believe is a good thing, and we will continue to do so.

In that sense, your support for Tibet will be a support for democracy and non-violence.

• (1355)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sweet.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacob, you have the floor.

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Sangay, thank you for coming to give testimony before our committee.

You talked about how monasteries are managed. Could you tell me what role Tibetans play in the political administration of their region?

[*English*]

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: Tibetans have representation in the local government of the Tibet Autonomous Region or in counties and prefectures, but their power, their authority, is very limited. For example, the governor of the Tibet Autonomous Region is a Tibetan, but the most powerful position, the party secretary, has always been Chinese.

What is disturbing is that, as per 2002 data, more than 50% of the Communist Party cadres in the Tibet Autonomous Region are Chinese, not Tibetans. That's 2002. It's been 11 years now and the Communist Party cadres, including postmen, are Chinese, not Tibetans.

If you look at the party structure, of the top 13 leaders, seven are Chinese and six are "Tibetans", but of the six, one is half Tibetan because her father or mother is Chinese, one is married to a Chinese, one has in-laws who are Chinese, and one has a girlfriend who is Chinese. That's how they test their loyalty. It's a token position, but even at that level your representation goes by your blood rather than your capacity.

In that sense, all the way down.... I can share with you the figure of 70-50-40, which is that 70% of business enterprises in Lhasa, the capital city of Tibet, are owned or are run by Chinese; 50%, as I shared, of the Communist Party members are Chinese; and 40% of Tibetans with college and high school degrees are unemployed. That is the situation inside Tibet.

We've been talking mainly about Tibet. With the permission of the chairman, I would also like to highlight the importance of Tibet environmentally. Tibet is vital as far as global warming and climate change are concerned. Tibet is called the "third pole". After Antarctica and the Arctic, Tibet has the third highest reserve of ice, maybe a little more than Canada. But unlike Antarctica and the Arctic, when it melts, it turns into rivers. Ten major rivers of Asia originate in Tibet. There is the famous Mekong River, which flows from Tibet all the way to Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos; the Salween River; the Brahmaputra River, which flows from Tibet, to India, to Bangladesh. When you read about a flood in Bangladesh, it has direct causality with the deforestation that is taking place in Tibet. Because of the rainfall and the silting, the riverbed rises and causes flooding downstream. Also, major rivers are from Tibet to India to Pakistan. The Yellow River, the cradle of Chinese civilization, and the Yangtze River, two famous rivers of China, originate in Tibet.

Some scientists say that before wars were fought over land, but nowadays wars are fought over energy. Soon wars will be fought over water. It's called "white gold" because it's so precious. Tibet is the source of 10 major rivers of Asia. Because of its having the third highest reserve of ice, climate-wise it has direct consequences for weather in Peru, in Latin America, with the jet stream over Tibet being affected.

So Tibet is vital as far as the environment is concerned.

Tibet also has a lot of natural resources, 130 or so minerals—not as much as Canada, but it has a lot of resources. It's exploited in a very unsound manner, engineering and environmentally. A lot of chemicals are being used. It has a direct relationship to the environment because when the chemicals are used and the minerals are exploited in an open way...when there's rain, the water goes to the river and affects the people downstream. Millions of people in Asia survive on the fishery and agriculture, and Tibet is the source of all these rivers. If they are poisoned or deforestation takes place, it affects millions of people downstream.

• (1400)

So Tibet is environmentally also very important, in addition to democracy and non-violence, as I shared with you.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Jacob: Thank you.

The Chair: You still have a minute and a half.

Mr. Pierre Jacob: Very well.

Mr. Sangay, which are the most important measures that you would like to see China adopt in order to improve the human rights situation in Tibet?

[English]

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: In addition to the several requests that I have made, a report from your committee would go a long way. And if it's possible, the Parliament of Canada could join the United States Senate in passing a resolution or motion on the issue of Tibet. The European Parliament has done that. The Italian Parliament and the French Senate have also passed resolutions on the issue of Tibet.

This is important because the act of self-immolation is a really painful cry by Tibetans, saying "I'm choosing to die and leave so that those people who are left behind, and the humanity left behind, will hear us and give us hope that our suffering and pain and lives do not go in vain."

A resolution by the Canadian Parliament will be a very clear message to Tibet, inside Tibet, that there is hope—we hear you; we support you; this is what we can do. You will join other members of the international community that regard human rights and democracy as very important, and you will send a clear message. That will be a welcome gesture by the Canadian Parliament.

If you could all form a delegation and request that the Chinese government give access to visit Tibetan areas, that would be another positive gesture for which we would be very appreciative.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jacob.

[English]

With the committee's permission, I just have a couple of questions that have been suggested by our analysts, who are anxious to make sure that we take this opportunity to get some of the key facts from the most authoritative possible source.

I was wondering, Dr. Sangay, if you could tell us.... You talked about the treatment of Tibetans in Tibet, and I realize when you say that, you are referring to those Tibetans who are within the People's Republic of China. But there is the Tibet Autonomous Region, and there are Tibetans who live in some areas that are not part of the autonomous region. I wonder if you could comment on their treatment, as opposed to those who live within the autonomous region.

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: The treatment of Tibetans everywhere—in the Tibet Autonomous Region, and in Kham and Amdo, the traditional provinces of Tibet—is the same. If you look at the protest in 2008, it was in Lhasa, the capital city of Tibet, all the way to Amdo, which is mainly in Qinghai and part of Gansu, and the Kham area, which is mainly in Sichuan and Yunnan. It was widespread. Even the self-immolators have been in Qinghai and Zhuang, and in the Gansu area as well.

Now as far as the definition of Tibet is concerned, the Chinese government tries to create confusion by saying “Oh, Tibet is only the Tibet Autonomous Region, not other areas.” The response is very simple. His Holiness the Dalai Lama was born in Amdo, which is presently in Qinghai. My late father was from Lithang, which is presently in Sichuan. If you go by the definition of the Chinese government, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and my late father are not Tibetans.

If you go by article 4 of the Chinese constitution, it clearly says that wherever “minorities” are living in concentrated communities, the autonomous region can be established. Now, we often say that China does not have the rule of law, but as far as that provision is concerned, they followed it quite effectively. That’s because 99% of Uyghurs live in the Qinghai Autonomous Region and 95% of Zhuang live in the Zhuang Autonomous Region. Almost 60% of Hui live in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region. Huis are Chinese Muslims who are scattered in 10 different provinces. They have done a fine gerrymandering to carve out the Xinjiang Autonomous Region for Hui people. Inner Mongolia has around 50% of Mongolians living in one area. They were granted a Mongolian autonomous region because they were nomads. They’re scattered in four different provinces.

It’s only Tibetans who live in one area, one geographical area, which is called the Tibetan Plateau. It is recognized by Chinese media and Chinese policies as the Tibetan Plateau. Nowadays, when they have meetings on Tibet, they call all the Tibetan leaders, the Tibetan cadres, from the Tibetan Plateau. In effect, they recognize the Tibetan Plateau as Tibet. On the one hand, they call it the Tibet Autonomous Region, but all the adjoining areas they call Tibetan prefectures and Tibetan counties. So in effect the Chinese government does recognize all of the Tibetan Plateau as one Tibetan entity. It’s just that geographically they have divided into five different provinces and administratively they have divided into five different administrative regions. Our argument is that from an administrative point of view, it is not effective and not efficient to have five different administrative structures for the same people with

the same culture, and even the same economy and geography. The definition of Tibet administration is that Tibet is a traditional Tibet.

The Chinese government has come up with the argument that if you look at the map of China, the traditional Tibet constitutes almost one-fourth of China. That’s a huge tract of land, so Tibetans can claim such a large tract of land in China. But if you look at the Xinjiang Autonomous Region, which is one-sixth of China, they have already granted one-sixth of China as the Xinjiang Autonomous Region, and almost one-ninth of China is the Mongolia Autonomous Region. It’s only the Tibetan area that is divided into six different provinces, in violation of article 4 of the Chinese constitution and the Minority Nationality Act of 1984.

Our definition of Tibet is very much in sync with the Chinese constitution and their own implementation as far as the Xinjiang Autonomous Region is concerned. Demographically, where 90% to 95% of the population live in one area, it’s only Tibetans where more than 50% are outside of the Tibet Autonomous Region, in violation of their own constitution.

• (1405)

The Chair: Is there a number that you feel confident is accurate as to the Tibetans who live in all of these areas put together—the Tibetan population, as a whole, within the PRC?

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: The Tibetan administration maintains that there are 6 million Tibetans. This figure is being disputed by the Chinese government, but even by their own data they estimate that anywhere from 5.5 million to 5.7 million are Tibetan nationals. Then again, because you can’t do a demographic survey, you can’t arrive at an exact figure, so our estimated figure is 6 million Tibetans.

The Chair: Thank you.

I want to thank you for coming here as a witness today. You’ve been extraordinarily informative, and we are all very grateful that you were able to be at this committee.

If there are no further matters, we are adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>