

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development Presentation notes – April 19, 2018

Canada's Engagement with Asia

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Thank you Chair and members of the committee for inviting me to speak today about Canada's engagement in Asia. My comments will be very specific in that they are limited to just one area of Asia, and that is Tibet.

As most of you know, Tibet is located in western China. To the south it borders India, Nepal and Bhutan. Most of Tibet is a high plateau, averaging approximately 14,000 ft. - the Roof of the World.

In the early 1950s, Chinese forces launched a military encroachment in Tibet that eventually led to the takeover of government and the exile of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in 1959. Since 1959 the Central Tibetan Administration has governed the Tibetan diaspora and steadfastly promoted non-violence and dialogue as strategies for reconciliation with China.

Unfortunately, under China's rule, Tibetans face an onslaught of human rights violations – violations of their economic, social, cultural rights as well as civil and political rights. These violations have been well-documented by credible organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. I'm not going to re-state them today.

Instead I would like to highlight 4 areas in which I believe that Canada could, and should, increase its engagement with China around the issue of Tibet:

1. Resumption of the Sino-Tibetan Dialogue

Envoys of the Dalai Lama met with representatives of the Government of China on ten occasions between 2002 and 2010 in an effort to resolve the conflict in Tibet through dialogue. Since 2010, however, that dialogue has been stalled and has not resumed.

The Tibetan administration advocates what it refers to as the "Middle Way Approach" as a pathway to peace. The MWA seeks *genuine autonomy* for Tibet within the Chinese state, and in accordance with China's existing framework for regional autonomy.

I believe that Canada is well-placed to encourage resumption of the Sino-Tibetan dialogue based on the Middle Path Approach which is not at odds with any Canadian policy – and in fact reflects many aspects of the Canadian experience. Canada’s familiarity with the challenges of both indigenous and provincial autonomy arrangements serves as a practical example of how to move this project forward.

When the elected leader of the Tibetan administration, Dr. Lobsang Sangay, spoke before the Subcommittee on International Human Rights last year, he emphasized that Tibetans are ready to meet Chinese counterparts “anytime, anywhere”. I encourage the members here today, to consider if and how, Canada might facilitate that process.

2. Climate change

Tibet is sometimes referred to as the “earth’s third pole” or the “world’s water tower”. These descriptors are more than campaign slogans – they refer to the strategic importance Tibet plays within the global effort to confront climate change. The references are derived from Tibet’s unique topography as the world’s highest plateau encompassing the source of Asia’s six largest rivers flowing into the world’s ten most densely populated countries.

Tibet is also home to the world’s third largest store of ice and largest source of accessible fresh water on the planet, attributes that represent a common cause between the Tibetan and Canadian people.

Unfortunately, Tibet’s fragile ecosystem is under threat from climate change and its impacts. Researchers warn that more than two-thirds of Tibet’s glaciers could disappear by 2050. Rising temperatures on the Tibetan plateau have downstream impacts across Asia affecting the pattern of monsoon rains on which much of the region depends.

The impact of climate change is exacerbated by bad environmental policies in Tibet. Unregulated mining has polluted once pristine waterways. The forced removal of nomadic communities from their land has disrupted the delicate balance between protection of the grasslands and the demands of economic development. The rapid growth of tourism, which increased 30% in the last year alone, threatens the viability of uniquely significant conservation areas.

In December 2017, Canada and China announced a cooperation agreement around climate change and environmental protection. The agreement offers an important

opportunity for Canada to engage Chinese counterparts around the Tibetan issue, and in doing so, to promote policies that will address climate challenges in Tibet.

3. Trade

It is an interesting observation that even as China has experienced significant levels of growth, Tibetans remain poor amidst that growth. In fact, the UNDP in China reports that Tibet is the poorest region of the country.

Because Tibetans experience poverty along with political marginalization, a potential free trade agreement between Canada and China raises numerous red flags.

The Canada Tibet Committee is not for or against the free trade agreement, and we don't view this discussion as a choice between advancing trade OR human rights. Instead, the CTC is concerned that increased trade and investment from Canada could entrench existing inequalities in Tibet or generate other negative impacts on the human rights of Tibetans. Those impacts must be identified and considered as the FTA is negotiated and before it is signed.

We have therefore called upon the Government of Canada to carry out a *human rights impact assessment* to be completed early in the process and preferably before formal negotiations are announced.

4. Reciprocal diplomatic access

Many of you will have read the statement made by Minister Dion in 2016 in response to an order paper question. In his statement, the Minister described multiple bureaucratic obstacles put in the way of Canadian diplomats seeking to visit Tibet - even when the purpose of their visit was to monitor Canada-funded projects. When Canadian diplomats were finally able to gain access, their movement was restricted and their activities were closely monitored.

Meanwhile, 8 official delegations from Tibet were welcomed in Canada between 2009-2016 with absolutely no restrictions placed on their travel within the country or on who they could meet while here.

In the United States, a "Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act" is currently pending in the US Congress. My hope is that Canada will also take action to encourage compliance with

this most basic diplomatic principle. The result - more and better access to Tibet - will be a significant step forward in efforts to monitor events inside the country.

In closing, the Central Tibetan Administration has declared 2018 as a “year of gratitude” towards countries that have supported the Tibetan people over the past many years. The Canada Tibet Committee will be hosting an event here in Parliament to thank Canada. I invite each of you to join us and to meet members of Canada’s Tibetan community in person.

Until then, thank you again for this opportunity to speak today.

Carole Samdup, Spokesperson
Canada Tibet Committee

*The **CANADA TIBET COMMITTEE** is a federally-registered not-for-profit organization created in 1987. 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. The CTC encourages support for Tibet from the Government of Canada. www.tibet.ca*