

**Statement by Dr. Lobsang Sangay**  
**before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee**  
**Asia Pacific Subcommittee on Crisis in Tibet**

**April 23, 2008**

Thank you Chairwoman, Senator Boxer, and members of the subcommittee, for the honor of speaking before you today. I applaud the actions of the Senate during this crisis, most notably the Senate letter to President Hu Jintao, sent on April 2, and the Senate resolution passed on April 9th (S. Res. 504--110th Congress (2008)). You have demonstrated your leadership, and the convening of this hearing attests to your commitment to support a positive way forward out of the current crisis.

There is now a window of opportunity for meaningful dialogue between the two sides to find a lasting solution to the Tibet issue. The issue will not go away, and the earlier it is addressed, the better it will be for all.

China as a great nation:

China wants to be a great nation. History has shown that greatness cannot be bought in the marketplace. Greatness must be earned. In the last fifty years, China has transformed itself from a poor nation to a booming economy. The world is mesmerized by its rapid modernization and hopes that along with its economic growth, forward strides will be made by and for its people in all spheres, not just economic.

The way China treats Tibet will reflect what kind of great nation China becomes. The present situation presents both a crisis, and a tremendous opportunity -- an opportunity for the Chinese government to demonstrate legitimacy in its leadership and confidence in its position by sitting down to negotiate with the Dalai Lama. Now is the time for the Chinese leadership to demonstrate not only its strength, but also its reason and its compassion as it builds a harmonious society for all.

History and Nationalism:

For China, the building of the modern nation-state was a response to a bitter history of Western imperialism during the late Qing Empire. Nation-state building was an effective way to fend off further foreign encroachment in a world dominated by Western norms of international practices. The Chinese government today perceives the Tibet issue from the perspective of Chinese nationalism, but fails to understand that Tibetans also perceive themselves as victims, or rather victimized by former victims of western imperialism. The inability of the Chinese government to move beyond the

constraints of this type of nationalism presents a huge obstacle to confronting the core issues facing the Tibetan people.

New thinking is needed for the nation of China to continue its evolution towards greatness. Let us be optimistic in anticipating that in contrast to the war-ridden 20th century, the 21st century will be dominated by themes such as globalization, interdependence, and cross-cultural understanding and tolerance. The Dalai Lama's middle path approach of seeking genuine autonomy within the framework of China has substantial legitimacy in the context of China's own rich history.

#### An Historic Opportunity:

The scale and magnitude of the recent uprising in Tibet reflects a tipping point for the critical mass of the Tibetan people. As is often the case in ethnic conflict, when economic suffering combines with political issues relating to identity and dignity, you have all the elements of a potent and dangerous situation. If the tragedy in Tibet is not addressed soon, the possibility of escalating tension and conflict are not a question of if, but when.

China has a historic opportunity before it. As it rises to the world stage to host the Olympic Games, now is the time for it to extend its hand to the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan people to enhance its proper place as a leader amongst nations.

#### Steps Forward:

A significant step would be for the Chinese government to allow for the normalization of the Dalai Lama within China. This is the first step towards genuine dialogue – to allow the Dalai Lama to be seen and heard by the Chinese people.

Specifically, the Chinese government should allow the Dalai Lama to respond to Premier Wen Jiabao's call for him to use his influence to restore calm and order amongst the Tibetan people. In order for this to happen, the Chinese government must allow the Dalai Lama's message to be heard inside China. Instead of attacking him and blocking him out, they should allow his voice, his image and his message of peace, justice and reconciliation to reach the Chinese public directly. If the Dalai Lama were allowed to publicly transmit a message inside China, to use his authority amongst the Tibetan people to ensure peace and harmony of the Olympic torch passing through Tibet, and the Games itself, this would be a significant step forward in dialogue. It would also demonstrate to the Chinese public, and the Chinese leadership, the sincerity of his position. It would open up space for Chinese and Tibetan people to work together towards a harmonious common future.

At this critical juncture, another urgent need is to enable the Chinese and Tibetan people to have more access to the free flow of information. Controls over access to information in China pose a serious impediment to China's progress. Specific to Tibet,

the fact that foreign correspondents are denied access to Tibetan areas only undermines China's own interests and position. Here, it is imperative that we continue to do what we can to support the process of opening up windows and channels to information, knowledge and understanding for the mutual benefit of Tibetans, Han and for China itself.

Finally, as a beneficiary of the Fulbright Program, which facilitated my enrollment in Harvard Law School in 1995, I have come to see the strategic value of academic exchanges. In my current position at Harvard, I have worked earnestly and in good faith on facilitating people-to-people exchanges between Chinese and Tibetan scholars which have led to six very productive sets of meetings over the past six years. Ultimately the Tibet issue has to be addressed through dialogue between Chinese and Tibetan people.

The suggestions I have put forward here are based on one principle, and that is that our first priority is to build trust between the two sides. There is nothing more urgent now than to create momentum for mutual understanding and that will require both sides to take some political risk. The first step towards this is to allow the Dalai Lama's message to be heard, not in the West, but inside China itself.

I pray that American leadership will actively support this approach. Having engaged in promoting dialogue between Chinese and Tibetan scholars for the last decade, I strongly believe dialogue is the best way to solve the Tibet issue peacefully.

Thank you.

## BIO: Dr. Lobsang Sangay

Dr. Lobsang Sangay is presently a Senior Fellow at the East Asian Legal Studies Program, Harvard Law School. After graduating from Tibetan Refugee school in Darjeeling, he received his BA (Honors), and LLB from Delhi University, India. In 1995, and won a Fulbright scholarship to Harvard Law School where he received his LLM. In 2004, he became the first Tibetan (among six million) to earn a doctorate degree from Harvard Law School and was a recipient of the 2004 Yong K. Kim' 95 Prize of excellence for his dissertation "Democracy in Distress: Is Exile Polity a Remedy? A Case Study of Tibet's Government-in-exile." In 2006, he was selected as one of the twenty-four Young Leaders of Asia by the Asia Society, a global organization working to strengthen relationships and promote understanding among the people, leaders, and institutions of Asia and the United States.

In India, he was elected the youngest national executive member ever of the Tibetan Youth Congress (CENTREX), the largest NGO among Tibetans in exile. For the last thirteen years, in his Track II initiative work, Dr. Sangay has organized six unprecedented conferences between Chinese and Tibetan scholars at Harvard University, including a rare meeting between HH the Dalai Lama and thirty-five mainland Chinese scholars in 2003. Prominent scholars on Tibet from Beijing, Lhasa, Dharamsala, Europe and the US have participated. The latest conference titled "Autonomy in Tibet" was held on November 27-28, 2007.

He has given numerous talks on the Sino-Tibet conflict and exile Tibetan issues in various institutes and venues around the world. He has been consulted by the news media, including the BBC, Time, South China Morning Post, Washington Post, Far Eastern Economic Review, and the Boston Globe, and has published articles about the Tibetan issue in the Harvard Asia Quarterly and Journal of Democracy.