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Mr. Michael Levitt

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

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•(1305)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.)): Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the 34th meeting of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

In 2013 this subcommittee undertook a study on the important issue of self-immolations that have occurred in Tibet. This is a tragic series of circumstances that involves at least 145 fatalities since 2009. Based on this concern, in 2013 this subcommittee heard testimony from the Central Tibetan Administration and its political leader, Sikyong Dr. Lobsang Sangay, who testified before this subcommittee.

Dr. Sangay was first elected to his position in 2011 and was re-elected to another five-year term in March of this year. In 2004 he was the first Tibetan to earn a Doctor of Juridical Science degree from Harvard Law School. He is an expert in international human rights law and was a senior fellow at the East Asian legal studies program at Harvard Law School before being elected Sikyong.

Dr. Sangay has returned to our subcommittee today to discuss the ongoing human rights situation in Tibet.

Thank you for being here today. Please make your opening remarks, and then we'll move directly to questions from the other committee members.

Thank you very much.

Dr. Lobsang Sangay (Sikyong, Central Tibetan Administration): Thank you, Chairman Michael Levitt and members of the human rights subcommittee.

It's a great honour to be back at the subcommittee today. I'll speak about the current human rights situation in Tibet.

Historically, Tibet was an independent country. It's under occupation now and there is political repression, economic marginalization, social discrimination, cultural assimilation, and environmental destruction.

The size of Tibet is also important, because some people think it's a small place in the Himalayas, but it is as big as western Europe or, in an American context, California and Texas combined. It is 2.5 million square kilometres of land. It is also called the third pole because after Antarctica and the Arctic, it has the highest reserve of ice. The top 10 major rivers of Asia flow from the Tibetan Plateau:

Indus, Sutlej, Bhahmaputra, Mekong, Salween, Yangtze, and Yellow River, among others. Hence, Tibet, as far as size is concerned, is big. Environmentally speaking it is vital, and from a civilization point of view, it's very old, ancient, and its culture is also very rich.

As the chairman just mentioned, when I came last time, there were self-immolations taking place and, the number of them has now reached 145. Among the self-immolators, there were young and old, teachers, students, monks, nuns, nomads, farmers, people from all walks of life and all parts of Tibet. That clearly shows the desperation and determination of the Tibetan people, and it is still going on. It also reflects that the repressive policies of the Chinese government are so severe that people resort to burning themselves. Of the 145, more than 120 have died.

I must make it very clear that of the 145 Tibetans who have committed self-immolation, none of them have harmed even a single Chinese person or property. Self-immolation is a violent way to die, but it's not violence because it has not caused any harm to any Chinese person or property.

Similarly, there is almost the same level of repression that there was in the cultural revolution era. As you know, after the occupation of Tibet in 1959, by 1962, the Communist Party of China and the Chinese government had destroyed 98% of monasteries and nunneries; 99.99% of monks and nuns were defrocked, sent to prison, tortured, or made to do forced labour, and many died.

Now, there is almost a revival of that situation, because, as we speak, the Larung Gar monastery and Yachen Gar are being destroyed, are being demolished. It is estimated that there are around 20,000 monks and nuns in that area. Voluntarily, Tibetans and Chinese have come to build their own shelters and shacks to be with their religious teachers.

In 2001, the Chinese government destroyed a major portion of the Larung Gar monastery and, as we speak, a second phase of destruction is going on because the Chinese government wants to reduce the number of monks and nuns from 30,000 to 6,000.

We fear that this is just the beginning of the destruction, because they will continue similar destruction to other monasteries and nunneries all over Tibet.

I think the Chinese government has a draft of a religious policy that is very repressive, that is very restrictive. If this Larung Gar monastery goes on, followed by destruction of other monasteries, I think then the very repressive religious policy will be introduced. That's our biggest fear.

I hope the current Government of Canada, which advocates human rights, religious freedom, and environmental protection, will take this situation into consideration and speak for the Tibetan people who are suffering in Tibet.

Also on the economic front of human rights, if you go to the capital city of Lhasa, I think 75% to 80% of shops, restaurants, and businesses are owned or run by Chinese, and at least 10 to 15 years ago there were signboards outside, clearly inviting people to apply for jobs within. The salaries, if you were Chinese, were \$50 a day, but if you were Tibetan, were \$30 a day. Imagine in Ottawa if there were shops with a sign saying that if you are Chinese we'll give you \$50 a day but if you're Canadian we will give you \$30 a day. How would you feel?

Not only is there domination or control of the economy by Chinese in urban areas, and now increasingly in certain rural areas but also there is blatant discrimination, so economic marginalization in Tibetan areas is also real.

The Chinese government has come out with a grid system, which is very intrusive. For example, every nomad and farmer is issued an ID card with second-generation biometric chips in it. Having an ID card with biometric chips sounds kind of logical, but what it does is to monitor the movement of nomads and farmers. Each time you travel within Tibet, there are very many Chinese police checkpoints. You keep swiping your ID card and some days they'll track you down, and ask where you're from and where you have been, and that could land you in trouble as well.

Surveillance is taking place all over Tibet. I have seen photographs of kind of small remote villages, and they have a gate on top of which they have put cameras. The surveillance, the grid system, and the biometric ID chips are very intrusive and repressive for the Tibetan people.

On the economic front, in the Tibet Autonomous Region, which was historically known as central Tibet, they have "upgraded" the Tibetan towns or prefectures to a city level. From a developmental point of view, upgrading a town to a city looks like progress, but in towns there are certain regulations that protect the local residents and also provide some subsidies to local residents. When you upgrade to a city level, it opens it up for Chinese migrants to come in and dominate the economy and control the system.

From a developmental point of view, when you say you have upgraded Tibetan towns into cities, it looks like progress, but in actuality it helps Chinese migrants to come and control business and the economy. Hence, in that way also Tibetans are facing discrimination as far as the economy is concerned.

I would like to touch on Tibet being vital, as far as the environment is concerned, but there's also a human rights element to it. As we speak, in Deqin County in Yunnan province, there are Chinese, but in the Kham area, the nomads, mainly farmers, are also protesting against Chinese companies that have come to mine a

sacred mountain in the area. A Chinese company wants to go and exploit the minerals that are there in the mountain. Farmers have come out and they're protesting, but now they're being beaten up; some are being arrested, and some are being put behind bars and labelled as splittists. This is a political act.

Actually, Tibetans are simply protecting a sacred mountain, which they worship, which they regard and respect very highly. That kind of exploitation is going on. Unfortunately, it's not only in Deqin County. The mineral extraction that is going on in the Tibetan areas is happening without due regard for the sustainability and protection of the local environment, without being culturally sensitive, and worse, without benefiting local Tibetans. The Chinese companies bring their own workers; they exploit it; and they take the minerals back to China without much benefit to the Tibetan people.

● (1310)

This is serious, because Tibet is the water tower of Asia. As I said, Tibet is the "third pole" according to some Chinese environmentalists as well, because after the Antarctic and the Arctic, Tibet has the third-highest reserve of ice. I think 14.5% of glaciers are in the Tibetan plateau. The difference is that in the Antarctic and the Arctic, when the ice melts, it goes to the ocean, but when the Tibetan glaciers melt, they form fresh water and turn into rivers; hence all the top major rivers of Asia flow from the Tibetan area.

That fresh water provides water to 1.4 billion people in Asia. According to Chinese environmentalists, 50% of the Tibetan glaciers have already melted. By 2100, 80% of the glaciers will disappear. If that happens and Tibet dries up, what will happen to the 1.4 billion people downstream who are basically surviving on Tibetan water, whether they're in agriculture, fisheries, or any kind of businesses depending on Tibetan fresh water? Tibet is thus vital from an environmental point of view as well.

Finally, I want to conclude by asking where the solution is. How can we move forward? I propose the middle way approach, which is to seek genuine autonomy for the Tibetan people. The middle way approach is the middle of two extremes, two views.

There is repression going on. We say that the Chinese government should end the repression of the Tibetan people and grant genuine autonomy, as per Chinese laws, and within China. If that happens, we will not seek separation from China or independence from China. This is a win-win proposition, and I think Canada can play an instrumental role because of its own experience towards minorities here in Canada.

The Canadian government stance towards first nations and Quebec is that the Canadian government is willing to address and solve these issues and to grant as much autonomy as possible and permitted within the Canadian constitution. Similarly, a middle way approach seeks genuine autonomy within the framework of the Chinese constitution. We say that if the Chinese government implemented its own laws, we could take that as genuine autonomy and we would not seek separation from China.

This is a win-win proposition for the Chinese government and the Tibetan people. This is my request to the Government of Canada. It could play a very important role, given the experience that Canada has, which it could share with the Chinese government.

To do that, we must have dialogue between the envoys of the Dalai Lama and Chinese representatives. From 2002 to 2010 we have had nine rounds of dialogue. The envoys of the Dalai Lama have talked to Chinese representatives nine times, but the last discussion was in January 2010. We have to continue the dialogue, and I hope the Government of Canada will play an instrumental role in reviving that dialogue.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will end my short presentation.

Thank you.

●(1315)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Sangay.

We'll move straight into the first round of questioning, which will begin with my colleague, MP Sweet.

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

Dr. Sangay, *tashi delek*. It's good to see you. Congratulations on your re-election. I know it comes with a heavy burden, given that you are a government in exile that must now represent your people, who are spread all across the world.

On that note, my first question to you is whether the project for the resettlement of Tibetan refugees into Canada, which began a few years ago, is still ongoing here. Has the number reached the 1,000 that was the target?

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: Yes, the previous government, as per the request of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, was very generous in granting 1,000 immigrant visas to Tibetan people, particularly to those from the state of Arunachal Pradesh. So far, around 900 of them have come to Canada and settled quite successfully.

Yesterday I had a meeting with the group of Tibetans who have come to Ottawa. There used to be only about a dozen or so Tibetans here. Now the number has increased to 100. I think it has gone very well, because from the very beginning our request was that visas be granted to Tibetans, but the cost be borne by Tibetans ourselves and our friends.

Nine hundred of them have come, and most of them are working and within a year have become taxpaying residents of Canada and will soon be citizens of Canada. The influx has been implemented quite successfully, for which we are very grateful. There remain 100, and there are issues of two dozen who are also Tibetans, but these issues will, I think, be addressed eventually.

Thank you very much.

Mr. David Sweet: Dr. Sangay, you were mentioning the destruction of monasteries. I think it would be good, probably, for people who are listening in, as well as our committee, to know why the Chinese administration, the People's Republic of China, continues to do this. What is at the root of this kind of destruction, this kind of behaviour?

I think it's probably also linked to the root of why they kidnapped the Panchen Lama, and maybe you might want to say a few things about why the Panchen Lama is important to Tibetans as well.

●(1320)

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: I think the ultimate goal of the Chinese government is to convert Tibet into Chinatown and make Tibetans into Chinese. They see Buddhism and Tibetan culture as the foundation of Tibetan identity, and hence they physically destroyed 98% of the monasteries and nunneries in the 1960s, and 99% of monks and nuns were sent to prison.

They thought they could just physically change the foundation of Tibetan civilization, our culture and identity. That's their primary objective, but they have failed because spirituality has more to do with your heart and mind. The physical destruction in itself will not end the Tibetan identity. That's their main goal, hence the kidnapping or the disappearance of the Panchen Lama for almost 20 years now. It's a matter of grave concern. They want to destroy the foundation of Tibetan civilization and spirituality.

Mr. David Sweet: If I heard your testimony correctly, it was way back in 2010 when the last dialogue happened. That was actually prior to His Holiness the Dalai Lama saying that the political affairs should be handled by a different office, and, of course, you were elected, and re-elected. Has there been any attempt by the People's Republic of China to engage your negotiators in dialogue since then? Have you made overtures? What has the result been?

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: Our stand is that we are willing to send envoys of the Dalai Lama to have dialogue with Chinese counterparts anytime, anywhere. From our side, our policy is middle way approach, and the peaceful way to solve the issue of Tibet is through dialogue. We are willing, but unfortunately the Chinese government has not indicated its willingness to receive our envoys as of yet.

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

The Chair: Thank you, MP Sweet.

We are now going to move to MP Tabbara with the next question.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your testimony here today. I just want to say that my thoughts turn to the earthquake that happened quite a few months back in Tibet.

You've been talking in your testimony about dialogue. What's the dialogue like with some of the neighbouring countries like India, Bangladesh, and Nepal? What constructive feedback have they given?

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: We don't have a formal relationship with any of the neighbouring countries like Bangladesh and others, but we do have our office in Nepal because a large number of Tibetans, around 10,000 plus, live in Nepal.

Unfortunately, Nepal is under tremendous pressure from the Chinese government, and the conditions of Tibetans in Nepal is also very serious. For example, Tibetans who were born after the 1990s are not provided with a residence certificate. They were born in Nepal, but they don't get documents, so going to school and getting employment is very, very problematic.

Countries like Bangladesh and ASEAN countries all know the importance of the Tibetan Plateau as far as water towers are concerned, but given the domination, the overwhelming influence of the Chinese government, not many countries are able to say much on the issue of Tibet.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: In recent years, has there been any change in some of the political dialogue that's been going on? Has the situation changed recently for Tibet?

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: There is no formal dialogue. The envoys of the Dalai Lama, as I said, are ready to go and engage in dialogue with Chinese counterparts, but that has not happened. The political situation has not changed; in fact, it has become worse, actually, inside Tibet, as you saw and as I explained to you, with regard to the destruction of monasteries, human rights violations, and environmental destruction.

Regarding your first question about the neighbouring countries, India has done the most for the Tibetan people. The largest number of Tibetans are in India. The Central Tibetan Administration is based in India, and His Holiness the Dalai Lama is based in India, for which we are very grateful.

•(1325)

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: What are some of the most effective ways that the Canadian government can engage with the Chinese government on the issues of Tibet?

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: As I said in my opening statement, one way would be to share the Canadian experience in dealing with the issue of Quebec and first nations.

I'm not saying that there are no issues from the perspective of Quebec and first nations—there are issues—but the fact is that the Canadian government is willing to grant as high an autonomy as possible within the Canadian Constitution. This is actually what we are proposing to the Chinese government. We are saying that if Tibetans are granted autonomy as per Chinese laws, we would take that. So Canada's experience is very helpful. Sharing that experience, hopefully, will convince the Chinese government that a peaceful solution through dialogue is the best way to resolve the issue. Aggression is not the way.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Thank you.

The Chair: We're now going to move to MP Garrison, please.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Thank you very much.

I thank Cheryl Hardcastle for giving me the time that she would normally have today.

It's a great pleasure to have Dr. Lobsang Sangay here, as well as Mr. Penpa Tsering, the Dalai Lama's representative to North America, who is here from Washington, D.C.

I have the honour to be the sponsor of e-petition e-431 to the Government of Canada. It was begun by Tsewang Rinzin from Toronto, a Tibetan who was born in Nepal and who is now here studying in Canada. This petition calls on the Government of Canada to have a delegation of Canadian parliamentarians or diplomats visit the Panchen Lama to determine his whereabouts and his well-being. It also urges the Government of China to release the 11th Panchen

Lama and his family immediately and without conditions. We are expecting a reply from the government on December 1.

I'd like to ask you about the importance of the Panchen Lama in terms of religious freedom and Tibetan identity.

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: The Panchen Lama is the second-best-known lama in the Tibetan Buddhist world. He also plays an important role in Tibetan history. His disappearance reflects a lack of religious freedom in Tibet. There was a committee formed by the Chinese government to select the Panchen Lama. It identified a couple of young boys, and then narrowed that down to one candidate who was endorsed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Even though the selection was done by the committee formed by the Chinese government, because he was endorsed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, he has disappeared. That shows that the Chinese lack of trust toward Tibetan lamas is so serious that they did not trust even the committee they had formed.

I think we are all very concerned. We all want to know where the Panchen Lama is and we want to know about his health, his way of living, and his education. It is very important that he, as a lama, receive spiritual teachers. The lack of any kind of spiritual teaching is not good for him as one of the very well-known lamas in the Tibetan Buddhist world. So, it's a major concern for us. If anyone can go and visit him, they will be welcomed, but so far it has been very difficult. The politicization of the reincarnation process for lamas, I think, is simply in clear violation of basic human rights.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Most of us are aware that it's been 21 years now since there's been any information on the whereabouts of the Panchen Lama.

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: Yes.

Mr. Randall Garrison: We heard some discussion about the destruction of monasteries. Again, I'd like to go back and connect that very directly to religious freedom and the Tibetan cultural identity. I think you have been very clear on the government's reasons for its opposition to the monasteries. Can you turn that around and talk a bit more from the Tibetan side about the importance of the monasteries in Tibet?

•(1330)

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: Monasteries are very important from the point of view of civilization. One very well-known Buddhist scholar said that before Tibet was occupied, there were three million books or texts in Tibet, when Tibet had a population of only six million. For every two Tibetans, there was one book, mostly Buddhist books.

Tibet, in that sense, is considered the most literate or well-read nation. Most of the books were burnt or destroyed, and 75% of the statues and artifacts in monasteries were looted or burned or have disappeared.

As I said, the purpose of all this is to destroy the very foundation of Tibetan civilization. For us, Buddhism is the life and soul of the Tibetan people. I think it is under threat, which is simply unacceptable from a human rights point of view.

Mr. Randall Garrison: I've had the great pleasure of spending some time with both of you this week. I was relating some of the things you've told me to another Canadian who said that's a sad story.

I would like us not to think of the Tibetan story as a sad story, because that implies some inevitability or an inability to reverse it. Canadians should still think of it as a shocking story that these basic human rights are still being violated on a daily basis, and should not become inured to the fact that just because it's gone on so long, that means it has to continue.

Are you finding greater interest in the Tibetan story outside of China and Tibet at this time?

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: On the one hand, yes, Tibet is a sad story. It's a tragic story. I go to these kinds of committees and share the human rights violations in Tibet. But within Tibetan people there is a sense of resilience and perseverance, because we are a proud people with a great civilization and a long history. We can compare with any civilization, any nation. Hence I always say—I'm not trying to politicize it—Tibetans do not fear China, because nowadays there's talk about what would China do. Everybody is scared of China. We say we do not fear them it we have lived side by side with it for thousands of years.

At one time when Tibet was a great empire, we invaded China and occupied the capital Xi'an for a couple of months and imposed a puppet emperor also. This time, it's doing it to us. We have been in close proximity, so we are in some ways genetically adapted to dealing with it and confronting it. When I talk about human rights violations in Tibet, please don't take that as a sad story but rather as a reflection of our determination and resilience.

As I mentioned, in the 1960s, it destroyed 98% of monasteries and nunneries. From the time we were exiled under the leadership of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, we have rebuilt all the major monasteries in India, Nepal, and Bhutan. The Nalanda tradition—the famous Nalanda monastery of India was burnt down 300 years or so ago—was revived in India by exiled Tibetans and we educated hundreds and thousands of monks and nuns in exile. Many of them have gone back to Tibet now illegally. There's a long story of how they go back.

Now we have revived Buddhism in Tibet. The famous Nalanda-based tradition, the teaching, is alive because of exiled Tibetans. So when I say we are resilient, we are fighters. We are. We have proven it, and also in exile. I'm the political head of the Central Tibetan Administration. We run our administration like any other government. We have an education department that runs about 70 schools—primary, middle, and high school—and mostly it's subsidized and free, and we provide scholarships. Our foreign office has 13 offices around the world, including those in D.C., Geneva, Brussels, and Tokyo. We run our own settlements. We run our hospitals and clinics. So we function as does any other government even though we are in exile.

You read about the 60 million or so refugees in diaspora communities around the world, about Syrian refugees, about the 500,000 refugees in Kenya still living in tents after 20 years, but our way of thinking is very different. We are refugees for political reasons but we are human beings, capable human beings, and resilience and self-reliance are the norm and the practice. We run our own thing. We are still here after more than 50 years. I've come back to this subcommittee and I'll keep coming back until the voices are heard loud and clear from Ottawa to Beijing and basic freedom is restored to the Tibetan people.

•(1335)

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you, Dr. Sangay.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Sangay.

We're now going to go to MP Miller, please.

Mr. Marc Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Socurs, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Dr. Sangay, welcome. I have a quick question. I'd like you to perhaps develop on the middle way and how you see that as the way forward, touching perhaps on two aspects. First, how do you perceive the reception of this approach by the Chinese government? Second, how are you able to do this given the very difficult reality that you face as an administration in exile? How do you achieve consensus and how do you know that this is the proper way to reflect what both the people in Tibet and those in exile believe? I'm just curious as to how your structure achieves this policy perspective.

I guess the first question is with respect to the Chinese government.

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: I think you need both sides to be in the room to have dialogue and negotiations to resolve the issue of Tibet. From our side, we are willing and we are ready. The envoys of the Dalai Lama are ready to meet with their Chinese counterparts. If you look at the past 50 years, you see there is not much reason to be optimistic because repression has been the norm and practice, and it has gotten worse now. One should always remain hopeful that the wisdom will prevail in the minds of the Chinese government leaders and courage will come to their side and they will enter into dialogue to resolve the issue.

Every other conflict area, from Northern Ireland to anti-apartheid regimes in South Africa, to Aceh, to East Timor, to the Berlin Wall, you just name it, at one time was in a similarly impossible situation, but each situation was addressed one way or another. We also hope that our turn will come. I do believe that our turn will come. When Aceh got its autonomy, and Northern Ireland addressed its issues through the Good Friday Agreement, and the Berlin Wall came down, and recently when Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest and accepted a Nobel Peace Prize and is now the leader of the Burmese government, we always think we will be next.

I've come here to the subcommittee to seek your support as well as good karma so that we can transmit those to Beijing, and I hope we'll be the next in line given all the success stories that have happened with all these major international events that we have seen so far.

Mr. Marc Miller: Just to re-centre what I had asked, how do you believe this approach, the middle approach, will be received by the Chinese government? Second, how do you achieve a consensus that reflects the wishes of your people both in Tibet and abroad, in exile?

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: Tibetans inside Tibet will accept the middle way approach as the policy. They will support it also, because His Holiness the Dalai Lama is the undisputed leader of the Tibetan people, inside and outside. The Chinese government denies that sometimes, but if they are willing and open, we could have a referendum in Tibet and give them the choice of whether or not to accept the middle way policy. I often say this. The middle way approach is envisioned by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, hence Tibetans and Tibet fully support it.

One clear bit of evidence is that the secretary of the Communist Party in Tibetan areas is the most powerful position, but the party secretary of the Communist Party of the Tibet Autonomous Region, for example, has never been a Tibetan. It's always been Chinese. Recently, the party secretary was promoted. He was third in line behind two Tibetans, but the Han Chinese was promoted to the position of party secretary. After party secretary, there's a deputy party secretary and the governor, who are Tibetans. Once they retired from the official position, the very next day, they wrote to the Chinese presidents Jiang Zemin, Deng Xiaoping, and Hu Jintao. They said His Holiness the Dalai Lama is the solution to the Tibet issue.

I am talking about the highest Tibetan office-holders. They all have said in writing to the Chinese government and Chinese leaders that His Holiness the Dalai Lama is the solution, that he is not a problem, and that the Chinese government should listen to him and talk to him. This is in writing. So clearly, if the highest Tibetan Communist party members have explicitly written to the Chinese government saying his Holiness is the solution, clearly, the people who are religious, who have complete loyalty to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, will accept the middle way approach.

The middle way approach is very much provided for in the Chinese constitution of 1982 and the Minority Nationality Act of 1984, so we are saying that if the Chinese government implements its own laws, we will take that as autonomous. So it is as reasonable and as moderate as one can get. The Chinese government should have no objection whatsoever. If it objects, it's objecting to its own constitution and its own laws. That way, the middle way, is acceptable to Tibetan people inside and outside and should be acceptable to the Chinese government also.

Another piece of evidence is that of the universal plea of the 145 self-immolators who burned themselves was for the return of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to Tibet and for freedom for the Tibetan people. That's the universal plea, so when Tibetans are dying, burning themselves, and uttering that they want to see the return of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to Tibet, it's clear evidence that Tibetans and Tibet accept His Holiness the Dalai Lama as their leader and not the Chinese government.

There is no competition that if a referendum were held to choose between the Chinese president and His Holiness the Dalai Lama, I think 99.9% of Tibetans would support His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Sometimes I also say, given my elected position, that any day, if the

Chinese leader, whoever is there, wants to have an election, I am willing to be the other candidate, and I'm pretty sure I'd win hands down, because ultimately Tibetan people would prefer to have a Tibetan guy administering the region rather than a Chinese person. That's what I believe, and if the Chinese government doesn't accept it, then Canada can be an observer and organizer of an election and we can have an election.

• (1340)

Mr. Marc Miller: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

MP Anderson.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

One of the things we established when we were in government was the Office of Religious Freedom. Ambassador Bennett was providing leadership around the world, including with the international working group. The government has chosen to shut that down, but it has set up a departmental office with a budget of \$15 million. We're told \$5 million of that has been given to the United Nations already, but it's also exploring partnerships. There's \$10 million available there. Would you be interested in a partnership with the government, and if you were, what would that look like? What could we recommend to the government that would work for you?

• (1345)

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: I think you are asking an obvious question, and I think the answer is resoundingly yes.

As per the conditions and as per the requirements, I think the Central Tibetan Administration, if allowed, and if not, a Canadian-based NGO, could apply for the grant and if granted it would be of major use, definitely, because we have Canadian-based NGOs that advocate for human rights for the Tibetan people, for religious freedom for the Tibetan people, and they will follow all the norms and conditions required. I'm pretty sure they will be eligible.

Whether the grant is granted or not is up to the authorities to decide.

Mr. David Anderson: Perhaps that's something we can take up as a committee. I won't speak for everyone here but I think I can speak for our side of that equation.

In 2015 the government enacted some national security laws, and people have said that they're basically vague, they're overreaching, and they violate human rights. I'm just wondering if you can tell us a little bit more about the application of those laws and what those have meant for the people of Tibet.

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: Often I say that, if you really want to understand China, you have to know the Tibetan narrative. Unless you understand the Tibetan story, you will not understand China, because the National Security Law that you mentioned actually already—before it was passed, before it was adopted—was practised in Tibet. So whatever happens in Tibet first is later implemented. I can give you a few other examples as well.

Canadian-based NGOs or American-based NGOs, any NGO that had some humanitarian projects like education or health were all removed and banned from Tibetan areas for “national security reasons”. If you had an NGO from Canada—and I don’t want to name any—that had projects in Tibet, it was told, “Now you can’t do that” because opening up schools and giving textbooks to Tibetan children was seen as a threat to the national security and it was prevented.

After the adoption of the National Security Law, it’s now being implemented in civil society in China in general with regard to all the religious organizations and NGOs—so you can clearly see the restrictions and repression that are going on based on this law. That is because “security” is translated or interpreted very liberally. If three Tibetans come together to meet, the Chinese government can say, “We disallow the meeting” and then they will label these people as splitists.

Recently I had the privilege of meeting with the honourable Speaker of the House of Commons in the U.K. That very day, I think, the Chinese embassy there complained to the foreign ministry and then the next day the spokesman of the Chinese foreign ministry complained. There was a long article in the Xinhua news agency, because those were labelled as splitist activities. I was just meeting a speaker of a sovereign country. How can that be a splitist activity?

They labelled me, even though I was outside. You can imagine what is going on inside China and in Tibetan areas.

Mr. David Anderson: Can you tell us, in terms of the human rights violations, which places the international community should really be paying attention to? There is a bad general situation, but in terms of human rights, where specifically should we be focusing?

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: As I said, the human rights violations are very widespread.

Mr. David Anderson: Yes.

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: There is political repression. If three Tibetans come and shout a slogan, they will be arrested. There is denial of religious freedom. Even having a photograph of His Holiness the Dalai Lama could land you in jail.

There is cultural assimilation. For example, in Canada bilingualism is encouraged and allowed, let’s say in Quebec, but in Tibet the language of instruction at the university level, high school level, and middle school level is Chinese. Tibetan is not the language of instruction. Chinese is the language of instruction.

As well, as I shared with you, there is the destruction of the environment. Tibet has 123 or 124 kinds of minerals. I think the second-largest copper mine in the whole of China is in Tibet. There is gold, borax, copper—you name it. All of this is exploited by the Chinese government.

The human rights violations are so widespread that one could pick any of them, but I would urge your committee to focus on—since it is of urgent concern to us—the destruction of the Larung Gar monastery, because we think this is a precursor to much more destruction and demolition of monasteries and nunneries, and then very repressive policy on religious freedom will be introduced and that will be quite draconian.

● (1350)

Mr. David Anderson: We’ve seen this destruction of religious houses of worship in other places in China as well over the last couple of years.

China has lots of different types or structures of government or whatever, but you talked about autonomy. Is there another area of China that already has autonomy similar to what you’re talking about?

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: Yes, you can divide China into areas of Han Chinese, Tibetans, and other “minorities.” In the Chinese area, for example in Hong Kong, there is one country with two systems there. In Macau, there is one country with two systems. Shanghai has a special economic zone. Shenzhen has special economic zones.

The Chinese government gives this excuse, “We can’t grant autonomy to Tibetan people because that will encourage others to seek autonomy.” But in their own areas, they have created so many autonomous zones from an economic point of view. For example, the province of Sichuan was a province of 100 million people. They carved out Chongqing municipality, with 20 million people, and created another special administrative area. They even carve out even geographic areas, and they grant very many autonomies within China to Chinese people. When it comes to Tibetans, they say, “You are not entitled.” Hence there is a racial element in the implementation of Chinese laws as well.

Mr. David Anderson: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Sweet, you have a 30-second question and a 30-second answer, and then we’re going to move to MP Khalid.

Mr. David Sweet: Chair, actually I have really more of a statement.

I just think, Chair, and most people have probably observed this, that if you remove people’s language, if you remove the religion that they were born into and grew up with, and then you make it illegal for even pictures of their leaders to be around.... I don’t know of a clearer representation of an effort to totally eliminate a culture than this practice by the People’s Republic of China towards Tibet.

The Chair: MP Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you very much for coming in today and expressing your concerns. They are very well heard in this room.

Just to follow up on what MP Sweet said, can you tell us a little bit about what is happening at the grassroots level by Tibetans to make sure that their culture is alive and well within Tibet? What kinds of initiatives are being taken by Tibetans to keep their culture alive?

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: As another member previously said, on the one hand, it’s a sad story. For example, in the 1960s, along with the destruction of monasteries and nunneries, four things were banned or discouraged—religion, culture, language.... Tibetans were even made to wear suits like those worn by Mao Zedong. They all had to wear Chinese dress.

Now, 50 years hence, the Tibetans in Tibet are wearing traditional dress. For example, we observe every Wednesday—today is Wednesday—a “White Wednesday”. On White Wednesday in Tibet, they all wear Tibetan dress. They think Tibetan, eat Tibetan, do Tibetan. That's going on.

When friends and families call each other, they have a box into which, each time they use a foreign word or a Chinese word, they put a set penalty. A week or two later, they take that box to a monastery or to a school as a donation.

The rich business people have, just as we have *American Idol* or *Canadian Idol*, a competition for the best Tibetan writers and best Tibetan speakers. You get cars or bicycles. This is going on at the people's level.

Normally on Wednesday I wear traditional dress in India. Today I am here in subcommittee. so respecting your etiquette, I'm in my western dress, but in solidarity with them, every Wednesday I wear traditional dress.

As I said, Tibetans are a very resilient people. No matter how repressive and systematic the violation, Tibetans fight their way out. We're talking about third-generation Tibetans wearing Tibetan dress and speaking the Tibetan language. As I mentioned, of the 145 self-immolators who burned themselves, many were very young. They know what they are doing, and they are dying for a cause. In that sense, we are fighters with courage.

Martin Luther King talked about once we climb the mountaintop. When I heard his speech, I said we are genetically adapted to climbing mountains. We thought that was easy. That's how we think.

At the grassroots level, we have rebuilt the monasteries; we are wearing our own dress and speaking our own language, so we are recreating the nation, culture, and civilization.

We have been on the Tibetan plateau for thousands of years; we will be there for thousands of years. For the Chinese to settle there permanently will take hundreds of years of genetic adaptation, because they are from the lowland area. In summer, urban areas have a Chinese majority, because many of them come to do business and are subsidized by the Chinese government. In winter now, Tibet has a Tibetan majority.

I believe in global warming, but I'm not a big fan of global warming. We want global warming to slow its pace. As long as Tibet is cold and has a high altitude, fewer Chinese will migrate and settle there.

• (1355)

Ms. Iqra Khalid: We would have loved to see you in your traditional dress today. Here in Canada we really celebrate diversity. I encourage you in the future to please really show us your Tibetan culture. We'd love to see it.

Thank you.

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Our time is almost up. We're going to go for one last question to MP Garrison.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Given that our time is short, I want to focus on Canada's role.

Early last summer I asked the Canadian government a question on the Order Paper about being able to observe what's going on in Tibet. We got back an answer to question 337 in which the Canadian government said, “TAR officials routinely attempt to either delay [Canadian] visits or...make it very difficult to obtain permits.”

This raises the question for me of what we can do. Someone suggested a reciprocity policy: that maybe Canada should also not grant visas to representatives of the Chinese Tibetan government; or perhaps we should organize a delegation of parliamentarians and challenge China to allow an unrestricted visit to Tibet. Are there other ways that we, as Canadians, could promote the dialogue you're talking about? What things do you think it might be useful for us as parliamentarians to do?

Dr. Lobsang Sangay: It is for your committee to decide on the issue of reciprocity. We don't have a firm stand on whether or not to ban others from coming to Canada, but I think there should be reciprocity in the sense that, if Chinese diplomats have access all over Canada, then Canadian diplomats should have access to Tibetan areas as well. One should insist; one should persuade; and one should persist.

If Canadian members of Parliament can visit Tibet as a delegation, that will send a very powerful message to Tibetan people that their voices are heard and that they have support around the world. Even today's hearing is also a really powerful message to Tibetans inside Tibet, because they are suffering. Many of them are dying. Many of them are in prison. They experience torture as well.

In the dark alleys when they hear—they really hear this hearing today—they will say okay, our voices are heard in Canada. The subcommittee on human rights has heard us. Even though they are suffering, they are not suffering in silence. Their voices are magnified and heard. Hence, this is a very powerful way to support them. If a delegation from Canada can go and have access, and meet with them, that will also be a message of justice. The declared policy of the Canadian government involves religious freedom, human rights, inclusiveness, and environmental protection. All these principled stands will be a reality, will be practised, if a delegation could go and visit Tibetan areas.

With that, I want to thank Chairman Michael Levitt and all the members of the subcommittee. It's very kind of you to invite us. It's a great honour to be here. I do believe justice will prevail in Tibet sooner than later. Aung San Suu Kyi beat us, but I'm sure His Holiness the Dalai Lama will outlive many of the Chinese leaders, because he has already outlived Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, and other leaders. I think we will be next and we will see the day when His Holiness Dalai Lama will be in Tibet, and Tibetans in Tibet will dance in front of the Potala Palace. All of you will be welcome as our guests at that time.

Thank you very much.

• (1400)

The Chair: Thank you.

Before I formally close, we have a point of order from MP Sweet.

Mr. David Sweet: On a point of order, Chair, I think because we had such a spirited and courageous representation of what the Tibetan people stand for, and because MP Khalid said the next time the leader comes he should be wearing traditional dress, I would want to also encourage him to bring momos, because that's really another great cultural example of Tibetans.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Sweet.

That appears to be the end of our time for today.

Dr. Sangay, on behalf of all members of this subcommittee, I would like to thank you for your testimony and for providing us with further insight into the ongoing human rights situation in Tibet. I'm sure I express the feeling of everyone around the table when I say your comments were very informative and very valuable for this subcommittee.

Colleagues, we will see you tomorrow at 1 p.m.

The meeting is adjourned.

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