

Q. What is the current status of the middle way policy?

A. I always say that the main thing is dependent on the Tibetans inside Tibet. As long as they're repressed, as long as they are resisting, the Chinese government has to change or review its policy. The fact remains that there is a lot of resistance going on in Tibet and there is resentment. Case in point is a hundred and forty nine immolations. Protests against environment, protests against mining, protests against hydropower, so all kinds of protests are taking place all over Tibet. 2008 made it clear, the self- immolations made it clear. So that is there now.

Once you do that, the Chinese government should review their failed policies and say that we have to relook this and we have to do something about it. So while they are doing it or they are not doing it, our job is to create awareness internationally including in India, so that the international community can echo and enforce our point of view that there is repression going on, which is not acceptable. There has to be a solution to the Tibet issue. Hence, what is the solution? What is the process? Through dialogue. Dialogue between the envoys of the Dalai Lama and the representatives of the Chinese government. So there have been nine rounds of dialogues between 2002 to 2010. So this is where we are now, right. Now the issue is, and I have always believed this, that during Xi Jinping's first term, dialogue is less likely mainly because in the last meeting with the Dalai Lama's envoys was in January 2010. From January 2010 they stayed on till June 2012. Two and a half years. Same envoy, met Chinese representatives, made efforts to reconnect with the Chinese counterparts for two and a half years. They could not meet, and hence they resigned. So in June 2012 we had to make a decision. Whether to appoint another envoy and try again to reconnect, but then the likelihood of that succeeding was low because the envoys who had contact and network with the Chinese counterpart for the past 10 years could not go back for two and a half years and thus the likelihood of the new envoys making contact with the Chinese counterparts was less.

Thus, new envoys were not appointed but we have always maintained this stand, that anytime, anywhere, the Chinese counterparts would like to meet with the envoys of the Dalai Lama, we are ready. Anytime. We are ready to send the envoys when they are ready to meet. That is our stand. But then, another fact is, not only for two and a half years they could not connect, but also any president or prime minister in their first term, they will focus primarily on domestic issues and re-election. That is the reality of politics. Of course, there are some exceptions. So we are led to believe that Xi Jinping will focus more on domestic issues, consolidate his position and go for re-election. So by the end of this year, Xi Jinping will enter into the phase of his re-election and in all likelihood, he will be re-elected with his own team. Now in their second term, the presidents or prime ministers tend to focus on legacy items. They want to leave a legacy since their term limit is coming. President Obama tried to deal with the Iran issue and the Cuba issue. The climate change was one of his legacies. This

is how politics work. So Xi Jinping is completing his first term and will be coming back for his second term. In his second term, if he wants to take up the issue of Tibet, and solve the issue of Tibet, then we believe it is a low hanging fruit.

So this year we have launched, 2017, as the year of campaigning. Since the leadership in the Chinese government is changing, the Chinese leaders are looking around to see what issues are there to focus on and hence 2017 is the year of campaigning from Larungar to Panchen Lama to self-immolations. You will see various campaigns happening all over the world. 2018 is the year of gratitude, thank you, for that will mark the 60th year of being us, of being in exile. So we want to thank India and we want to thank countries all over the world for being so supportive of the Tibet issue and of the Tibetan people. So that is the 2017 and the 2018 campaign. So while the Chinese leadership is changing we want them to know that the Tibet issue is a global issue and a serious issue. Tibetans have made it clear with all the campaigning in the streets. 2018 we will make it in the boardrooms, where we will thank and appeal various countries for their support and tell them that the Tibet issue needs to be solved because it has been 60 years now. So what can we do? We need to revive the dialogue between the envoys of the Dalai Lama and the Chinese representatives. That is the way to go. So these are the efforts being made. So India, internationally, 2017-18, so by 2018, if Xi Jinping wants to solve the issue of Tibet, we believe it is a low hanging fruit and a major legacy item. It will leave a very positive mark in the history of the world and the history of China and Tibet if he solves the issue of Tibet.

Q. The Chinese constitution does not stipulate the exact amount of autonomy that it is willing to concede to Tibet. So, if the Chinese government does decide to get into dialogue with the Tibetan government what is the expectation of the Tibetan government with concern to the degree of autonomy that Tibetans inside Tibet will have?

A. One can make the argument that in the Chinese government, the degree of autonomy to be provided is clear. On paper. In the constitution of 1982, the Minority Nationality act of 1984 based on article 14 and article 12, the demarcation of the autonomous region and the rights that the Tibetan people should have is all there. It is the implementation. Right? So it's all there. Now you are right, you are making a bigger case, that even if we are given autonomy as per Chinese laws, Chinese laws can be changed at whims by the National People's Congress, which is anyway a rubber stamp. So then you can look at the case of Hong Kong as well and see the regression of autonomy while we are seeking autonomy. We can make that argument. And we can also read and revisit the 17 point agreement and say that we were granted some form of autonomy as per the 17 point agreement which they did not implement and in fact violated which ultimately forced the Dalai Lama and 80000 Tibetans to flee to India. So we can make these arguments which are in many ways valid.

So despite all of this why are we going for genuine autonomy based on the middle way approach? The answer is very simple. Given the repressive and very painful condition in Tibet, any situation is better than now. It is preferable to us. We cannot make a theoretical argument that lets wait till we get the ideal autonomy or ideal independence. We can't. On

any given day, Tibetans inside Tibet are suffering. They are imprisoned, they are burning themselves. They are protesting, they are imprisoned, they are being tortured. Their natural resources are being exploited, trees are cut down, rivers are dammed and then the discrimination they face is happening on a daily basis. So we have to stop and change or transform the situation from now. Any situation is better than now. So that is why we are going for genuine autonomy. So now we can make the argument that even if we are going for genuine autonomy, will they actually implement it or will they betray us like they did with the 17 point agreement or like they did with Hong Kong? However, we must take the chance. If you look at the autonomous arrangement in Chengde, or in Shanghai, or in other places, they are being implemented. So there are cases where there is regression, and there are cases where there is improvement. So we are saying that given the tragic situation in Tibet, any situation is better than now. It is preferable than continuing with what we have.

Q. Tomorrow, even after Tibet gets the degree of autonomy that it seeks, the Tibetans will have to be in constant interaction with the Chinese population. How do you see, and what measures do you wish to implement in order to see a positive interaction between the Chinese and Tibetan people?

A. All that depends on negotiations and final solution, and there have been cases. For example, 20% of the population in Ukraine are Russians. In the same pattern, they migrated. Ukraine is an independent country but they have some issues which is why they have challenges. In many ways they have challenges, but they are working it out. Look at Northern Ireland. Same situation. Christian population, Protestant and Catholic. Scottish and Irish, they are fighting against each other. They have the Good Friday agreement, they have autonomy, they are living side by side and making it work. But they are of the same ethnicity, as in, they are all white people. So even for Tibet, there will be a certain number of Chinese who will be there and historically, on the borders, they have been there. So there are such cases to be looked at and then decide from which date we should allow the Chinese to stay on, which date we should not and how to ascertain that everyone has human rights. Yet, Tibetans are majority and govern their own region. Because ultimately, what we are saying and what the Chinese say as well is that Tibetans are the masters of their own region, and they have autonomy, and that we have to translate into reality. Ultimately, Tibet has to be Tibetan majority and Tibetans must govern themselves. Now where do we draw the bottom line? 5, 10, 15, 20%, what level of authority, will the Chinese provide technical assistance for the decisions and actions made by the Tibetans, are all questions that shall be fleshed out in the details. But the bottom line is that yes, Tibet has to be Tibetan majority and Tibetans must have major authority as far as governance is concerned.

Q. Speaking of Tibetans being the majority in their own land, given the current Population Migration Policy of the Chinese government, they are already a minority and the two main regions of Tibetan population have been discounted from the TAR. So if the current population migration rate continues, the Autonomous region clause of the constitution will be null and void simply because Tibetans would cease to be a majority in their own land. How will the Tibetan government counter this?

A. Yes we say that Tibetans are a minority in their own land, but it all depends on how you define Tibet and where you do the survey or the measurement. The low lands of Tibet have always been a Chinese majority, for example, His Holiness's birth place. It used to be 85-90% Chinese back in the 1950s, now I think it is 97% Chinese. It has not made much impact. So the low lands or in the border areas, the Chinese are the majority. So if we club them, or include them in our count, then we can say that Tibetans are a minority in their own land. But these low lands have always been Chinese, so we have to work out an arrangement of this border and that border and how they will have the rights of citizens but obviously, the Tibetan administration should get preferential treatment. So this is how you demarcate the areas to be calculated.

But aside from that, the Tibetans are the majority in Tibet, that is inner Tibet, aside from the historical part where the Chinese have always been the majority and have increased in number in the low lands. Up in the mountains, at a higher altitude, Tibetans are still the majority and will be the majority for a long time to come. Now the Chinese are there in cities, like Lhasa and Chamdo, that also in summer. But they go back in the winters, including some Tibetans, because it is so cold. So Tibet is a Tibetan majority in winter; that is a fact. The Chinese are increasing mainly in the urban areas, because of the three 'S's. Suppressive Chinese government policies. Next, lot of subsidies given to the Chinese business people. You want to open a shop, you want to own a tractor, you want to own a rickshaw, anything you want to own, and you are given preferential treatment through subsidies. Third is summer. They are there only for the summers, because in winters they go back. SO once these three 'S's are removed, suppression, subsidies, the summer cannot be removed, then Tibet is once again a Tibetan majority. So once the subsidies are removed, it is pretty clear, once the British lost their jobs and salaries and ventures in India, they had to return.

So lot of Chinese, while they go to Tibet and live there, it is not always beneficial to them. And then, the altitude favours us. The Tibetans too moved from 3000 metres to 4000 metres high only 3000 years ago. Once we discovered barley, we moved 1000 metres up. Because we grew wheat, we could live only between altitudes of 2000-2500 metres high. This is because wheat does not survive through the winter. So once we discovered barley, we moved up. So it took us 500-1000 years of genetic adaption to move 1000 metres up. Chinese people living in the plains will I think need 500-1000 years of genetic adaptation to live that high up in the mountains. So Tibetans are Tibetan majority in the winter and the Chinese are in Tibet mainly because of the three Ss.

Now, we do have issues and complexities at the border areas, which I fully agree with. Lot of army personnel, lot of Chinese staff, they are there, mainly because of promotion, mainly because of salary, mainly because of long vacation. However, there are many Chinese, but they never come back, you see. A number of Chinese communist party members are there. Yes, you can say that there are three Chinese people in Lhasa this year, there are three Chinese in Lhasa the next year, but they are not the same Chinese. They are there because of the salary and the subsidies.

Q. the Tibetan cause has received a lot of international support from the very beginning that is because of the ideal that the Tibetan people espouse, which is of nonviolence and democracy. Yet, it is hard to ignore the fact that a lot of countries simply pay lip service to the Tibetan cause and are unwilling to take a concrete stand simply because each country has way too many vested interests with the Chinese. So what role do you see the international community serving for the Tibetan cause, in a real and substantial manner?

A. If you ask this question to Mongolians or Vigurs, or Chinese dissidents, they will tell you that they prefer the lip service being given to Tibetans than no lip service being given to them, for they don't get even that. So it all depends on whether you look at the glass half empty or half full. The Mongolians come here and they say, wow you get so much support from the international community, you go to the white house, and you can meet with senators and congressmen. When we go to DC, no one bothers and comes to look at us. Now from the glass half empty point of view, what you are saying is that the current measures are not enough and more needs to be done. So, for the moment, maintaining lip service is important and putting money where your mouth is, and funding the policies that have been promised is more important.

So you need to keep climbing the stairs. From no lip service to lip service, to more projects and funding, to more political statements and support. For example, the white house, of the US government, from 2012 on, upto 2016, have come out and applauded the middle way approach. It is the only government which has done so. This is not lip service. It is the USA, the president comes and says that he applauds and supports the middle way approach. If there is simply lip service, how is it that 208 other countries came forward and followed suit? That's a policy. In 2002, the Tibet policy of the US government is a staunch policy. Now, is the US government doing enough? Again, that is perspective. Many will applaud President Obama for raising this issue in front of Xi Jinping at the Rose Garden press conference. That is about as high as it can get. America can discuss 108 issues with China, but among the top 10 issues he raised was Tibet.

Having said that, we have to move from the Tibet policy of 2002 to the middle way approach being applauded by the president, to sending an envoy to the Chinese counterparts and pressing them, telling them that there ought to be a Tibet, there ought to be a dialogue. And are they doing it? Yes, I know. Secretary of state, John Kerry, had a discussion with the Chinese counterpart and they were down to banging the table. The wine almost spilt. That sort of animated discussion. They do take place behind the scene. So each step you take counts and one day it happens. When it will happen no one can say. I have said this in Northern Ireland, what is the difference between the Good Friday agreement situation today, to the situation a week prior? Same. Same number of killings, same number of violence, same protests, same hatred. One week later, it changed. What changed? The situation looks exactly the same. So what you seek, autonomy, the freeing of Aung Suu Kyi or Nelson Mandela, all look seemingly the same. But it changes here. Why does it change? You can have a 108 reasons post change. Then if they are the real reasons or not no one can say. Because, if I can identify one reason, then I will do it and repeat it in the Tibetan case. But I cannot. So the

most important thing is to continue to take it to that stage. So for us to continue, to bridge it, to march forward is most important. When we will reach that stage, no one can say. What is that stage, too, we are unaware of. But post agreement, post the freeing of Nelson Mandela, 108 books come out stating the reasons for the solution. But no one knew beforehand. So, in front of the international community, we must keep ourselves visible and keep our profile high. Persistence and presence, ultimately, is the key.

Q. As you said, that today what is lip service may tomorrow become more than that, in the form of policies and implementations that will ensure a genuine autonomy for Tibet. Can that also be thought of in terms of Rangzen (independence)? Today the Tibetans seek autonomy but tomorrow if things seem more hopeful, will they also push for Rangzen?

A. Why I say no is that China has already made it very clear. One China policy is non-negotiable. Territory and sovereignty of China is non-negotiable. So if you want to solve the issue of Tibet with the Chinese, non-violently, through dialogue, it is non-negotiable and Rangzen would be a non-starter. They don't want to meet you; they don't want to talk to you. You don't have to go far; you can clearly see that in the case of Taiwan. Taiwan is a de facto independent country; not only de facto, it is recognised by twenty or so countries. Much richer than us, they have billions of dollars, twenty odd countries recognise them and they have a treaty with the USA wherein the latter will come to its defence if Taiwan is attacked by the Chinese military. They have all that. They still don't declare independence. They say that they are for one China but two interpretation policy. If Taiwan is unable to do that, there is no way we can even go near that. The Chinese are that clear. So that situation is very unlikely for it is a non-starter.

Q. Ever since the Dalai Lama gave up his political powers, how do you see the people responding to the democratic spirit that has been set up both inside and outside of Tibet?

A. Oh, in a big way. For example, in 2001 election of Kailon Tripa (Prime Minister), 35000 Tibetans participated, 2006 elections, the number decreased to 32000. It dropped. In 2011 elections the number it increased to 49000, in 2016 it went up to 57000. Now from 32-57000, there is almost double the number of people who participated in the elections. Which is a big thing. Why? When you participate in the Tibetan elections, you have to pay your green book dues. So you have to make your green book, you have to pay for it, all dues, only then can you vote. That shows keenness, it shows responsibility and a willingness to participate. Not only when they participate in election, they have participated in debate. Heated debate. So they have animated discussion. If you look at other countries in the world, European countries, there is a decrease in number of people who participation of elections. The number has plateaued. Most of the advanced countries. But ours is the only one which has increased by not only 5, 10, 15, 40, 70% so that shows the energy and dynamism of Tibetans embracing democracy, election and policy as the answer.

There I see, partly, mainly because of His Holiness's advice, partly because of my participation also. Because the one factor that is there from 2011 to 2016 is my participation in the election as well. SO I am very happy with that contribution under the advice of His holiness because in 2010 his holiness's word was that anyone from Dharamshala who goes to America or Europe, only a handful of old people come to the talk. Why, because they know Dharamshala and they are connected. I used to do that same thing. Whenever someone from Dharamshala used to come to Boston, we used to say that we better show up to show support to the CTA (Central Tibetan Administration), our government and we have to present ourselves so 30-40 people show up.

Now 6 years, wherever I go, I have no problem filling up halls and any kind of auditorium. They have started renting out bigger and bigger halls the community can rent. Not only do they come to listen, all the mothers and fathers in their 30s and 40s, they dance and perform. The children dance and they welcome us. Sometimes it is extravagant. There is a line-up of 20 cars, and the children come wearing the traditional dress, Chema and then they go out of their way. But if you compare this with 2010, when hardly anyone came, the energy of Tibetans, not just participating in voting, the level of discourse, debate and participation is amazing.

You open any WeChat, I open it on any given day, I am told that there are a 108 complains and grievances against me. And there are another 108 good things said about me. I think that is good. That has changed. That gives me hope. After His Holiness devolved his political authority, the Tibetans are actually taking more responsibility, as per his advice. This is very good. And Tibetans inside Tibet also. I don't have them here, but I do have posters, HH poster and photographs are all over Tibet. How many posters with my photograph are also being shared all over Tibet! Songs are being composed in my name. Several of them have gone to prison also.

Who am I? I am nobody. I was nobody before 2010 and will be nobody after 2021. I am a simple Tibetan who wants to contribute to the cause. But the symbol I represent, the office that I represent, is what they are supporting. They are showing solidarity. Why would Tibetans inside Tibet sing a song? You have a lot of Youtube, nomads, there is a simple gathering where they are singing and praising and praying and things like that. It is not me a person, not me as Lobsang Sangay. It does not go to my head. It is me as the symbol, the office, that they are supporting, that they are singing for. That has changed and that is remarkable. Now normally, the trajectory usually goes spiralling downward. You've been here 60 years and the steam goes off, and the interest goes off and then participation goes off and then you disappear. But ours is not like that. We have plateaued, but it is picking up once again. That is the best sign, most hopeful sign that yes we are here for a long haul. That is why we have come up with the 50 year policy. So we have come up with a long term plan. Not that we want to stay here for 50 years, 5 years is the focus, middle way is the focus, dialogue is the focus, that is the primary objective. But we also need a plan for the next 50 years. So we are working on that and are switching to that.

Q. the middle way policy, ever since HH conceived of it, has been repeatedly put out in the public forum for the people to decide democratically whether they want it or not. And as of today, it has overwhelming majority. But in the spirit of democracy, in the future, if the people decide against it, and choose instead for Rangzen, then will the Tibetan government adopt a different stance?

A. It is a democratic government, so if people change their view, the government has to follow suit. It is very unlikely. I ran on the middle way, I won twice. There is a theory that there is a large number who actually want Rangzen. It is not true. There were candidates both in the 2011 and 2016 elections that ran for independence but it was made very clear by the Tibetans what they want. Also the middle way is not only a policy, it is a brilliant strategy. If the CTA is to advocate Rangzen, tomorrow the Indian government will come under tremendous pressure, because of Panchasheel treaty.

India is a member of the UN, UN charter article 2 Section 4 says that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the UN member must be respected and not violated. If you do that, we go to the International Court of Justice. We file against you, and you lose. Hence, we have the Taiwan dilemma. Taiwan wants to declare independence, but China is a hindrance and they have dispute over the one China policy. Due to this, the president of Taiwan, having been democratically elected, cannot go to America, cannot go to Europe, and can't come to India. This is simply because they have a dispute of whether Taiwan is independent or not. No one in Taiwan is asking for independence. It is simply alleged by China. But people in Taiwan do not want that independence. We are saying one China two interpretations. Simply for that debate, look at where Taiwan is. They cannot move anywhere. For all practical purposes, Taiwan is an independent country. Tell me how many places the president of Taiwan can go to?

So it is not easy to say we just declare Rangzen, and just by comparison you can see how it can be a bad thing. Another example, you don't have to go far. Nepal came under tremendous pressure, so the office of Tibet in Nepal has to be shut down. Their government refused to give even a residency card to a Tibetan. This has nothing to do with middle way policy, Rangzen or anything. It is a simple measure that declares you as a human being in this world. But it has not been granted, since 1990. You don't exist in this world. You don't have a record of your existence. So you cannot go to school, you cannot avail jobs, you cannot own anything. You are nobody. So it is easy to come up with a theoretical argument that what will happen if you declare Rangzen. It is very easy to see what happened to Nepal. The condition in Tibet is not good, and we are very worried.

And then recently the US delegation, the Congress delegation went and met anyone who matters in Nepal and raised this issue. They asked why they don't give Tibetans in Nepal a simple residency card. To show that they exist in this world? They said no. We can't because of Chinese pressure. So even though we have the middle way, and HH wants to go to South Africa, his visa is rejected, even though he is a spiritual leader and is a proponent of the middle way. I want to go to Bangladesh, on an invitation. Nothing to do with the Tibet issue. It is simply that I have been invited to talk on a forum on leadership. Even though one of the

ministers of the Bangladesh government was organising this, he came under pressure. Even though I am for the middle way. There is a theoretical discussion, what happens if you do this, do that.