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12th September 2001

H.H. the Dalai Lama  
Thekchen Choeling  
McLeod Ganj-176219  
Dharamsala  
Himachal Pradesh  
India

Your Holiness,

Re: The Conference Statement and Report of the 2000 Berlin  
Conference

We are writing to your office concerning a matter of some interest and significance to the nature and direction of the international Tibetan movement. We have taken the decision to write because, as you may recall, our organisation has been actively supporting the Tibetan cause since 1988, throughout this period we always hoped that our motivation was based upon a genuine concern for the plight of your people and nation's status. Therefore, we trust you will understand, and appreciate, our reasons for contacting your office, which is in the spirit of the invitation by the Kalon Tripa to "...make open and well meaning criticism against the Administration's action" (Press Statement of Samdhong Lobsang Tenzin Rinpoche 5th September 2001). Please forgive the somewhat lengthy nature of this correspondence, which was regrettably unavoidable, given the detailed nature of events. To ensure that other participants of the conference are kept informed of this matter we have taken the decision to circulate copies of this to relevant individuals and organisations world-wide. We would respectfully request that an urgent authority and influence is brought to bear upon this matter to help resolve the damaging confusion which has been generated.

In the late afternoon of 14th May 2000 at the Third International Tibet Group Conference (hosted by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation in Berlin) some two hundred and eighty two global supporters of Tibet agreed the conference statement and action plan. In the time honoured tradition of such events a tortuous debate switched to-and-fro concerning the terminology of these statements, while under the gaze of such figures as Lodi Gyari and Samdhong Rinpoche a commitment to democratic procedure ensured that a vote was taken on the final content.

After further wrangling (some, it was reported, behind closed doors by the aptly named 'steering committee') a document was finally agreed upon and duly issued to representatives. Apart from the usual tone of self-congratulation, and jaded mantras about 'harmonising efforts' and campaigning 'effectively', it contained some interesting and important features. One of which endorsed a proposal that would press the Tibetan Government in Exile (TGIE) to reconsider its standing upon Tibetan independence, should no progress be forthcoming within three years! A key section of the paragraph urged the Dalai Lama and the TGIE to, "...seriously consider demanding FULL INDEPENDENCE...or the holding of a internationally supervised referendum .....if no progress has been made.." (emphasis added).

This related to negotiations with the PRC on so-called "genuine autonomy". Equally importantly international Tibet supporters pledged to "...launch a major campaign for international recognition of Tibet's claim" (i.e.: Tibetan independence) should "no progress be made".

Some observers, including representatives of Independent Tibet Network, noted the re-emergence of the 'referendum proposal', first launched by the Tibetan government some years earlier when Tibetans, inside Tibet, would be asked to vote on 'independence' or the 'middle way approach'. All that project generated, which was later refined to target exiled Tibetans only, was disillusionment and frustration among many within the Tibetan Diaspora. The current attempt to re-instate a referendum (via international supporters), rather than a genuine barometer for determining the collective political aspiration of Tibetans, is seen by some as nothing less than a disguised effort to promote Dharamsala's 'middle-way policy'.

This subject was given a thorough and damning examination by Jamyang Norbu in his short essay 'Return of the Referendum' (WTN 8th August 2000).

What was of fresh interest concerned the demand for independence, should no advancement be forthcoming within a fixed period, and the commitment to lobby in support of that claim. Yet, having reached democratic consensus on the detail of the substantive content, which was endorsed by those attending the conference, something rather unsettling followed in the weeks after. Having agreed to establish an international Tibet support network (no doubt planned long before delegates arrived in Berlin!) and an ad-hoc committee to act as a steering committee (there's that shadowy cabal again) a 'revised version' of the Berlin statement appeared on the scene!

We received a copy from Dr Larry Gerstein (dated 14th June) of the International Tibet Independence Movement, and now a prominent member of the International Tibet Support. Network (ITSN). It was generally faithful to that agreed by delegates at the conference, apart from the aforementioned paragraph six, this had been modified with some key words removed! This now read:

"..urge the Government of Tibet in Exile to reconsider its position on independence.." (the former, important qualifying term "full" had been removed) While the previous, emphatic assertion, to campaign in support of that claim was now modified and somewhat weakened by the addition of an alternative option namely: "or for the conduct of internationally supervised referendum on the issue". In essence the revised version, expunged of its previous forceful emphasis, had retreated to a more cautious vacillating stance, providing a convenient escape route for international supporters of Tibet, should no progress result after the stated time scale of three years.

There are many questions raised by this, which is the authoritative version? When was the decision taken to redraft the statement? What of the incredibly naive posturing and spineless nature of the ITSN? (which appears not to have the conviction to reproduce its own stated policy). Then there is the issue of retrospective editing, without it seems democratic consultation of those who agreed to the wording of the original statement.

In addition the revised version revisits the flawed referendum proposal, already found wanting in its previous incarnations and reduced to ashes in Jamyang Norbu's essay.

There has understandably been a considerable degree of confusion following the publication of this revised version. Both John Jackson and Jeffrey Bowe, as representatives of Independent Tibet Network, were present throughout that final day and took a keen interest in the detail and procedures that took place. Like other delegates they too were handed copies of the agreed conference statement. The result of all this is that many individual Tibetans, and other organisations, have privately expressed grave concerns to our organisation about this matter.

It maybe of course that such alarm proves unfounded and the original, official version of the Berlin Statement has not in fact been changed. Yet those of us who have been working for Tibet maybe forgiven for being slightly suspicious, many will recall a previous occasion when substantive wording of a document was retrospectively changed. Controversy and international uproar followed the removal of the phrase, "statehood and independence" (which had again been agreed by conference) from the published report of the International Consultation on Tibet (London 1990). Due to the tireless efforts of Gerald Du Pré and Paul Ingram of Optimus, along with Independent Tibet Network (then Campaign Free Tibet), the deliberate deletion of this key phrase concerning Tibet's status was exposed to an international and highly prominent audience.

Has a similar process of censorship and manipulation occurred again? Who is responsible for the substantive redrafting of this crucial paragraph? Do we detect the hand of the steering committee of the ITSN? Or has this act been sanctioned by prominent Tibetans?

There were other aspects of the original conference document which raised some concern, namely Paragraph Four which referred to "substantive negotiations without any preconditions". This particular section resulted in Independent Tibet Network issuing a statement (14th May 2000) to conference organisers and delegates.

This stated that due to constitutional commitments to support the widespread aspiration of Tibetans for independence our organisation could not endorse any document which did not promote this central condition. In addition both the Exiled Tibetan Government and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation were specifically requested to ensure that a statement, outlining reasons for our opposition, be included in the final report. Independent Tibet Network wrote to Dr Rolf Freier, (consultant to the Friedrich Naumann Foundation and editor of the conference document) who indicated that he had indeed included our statement and this had been passed to Dharamsala, this was during June/ July of 2000! Yet controversy continues as some seventeen months later the report has (at the time of writing) still not been distributed to delegates!

Why has it taken so long? Clarity is sorely needed to dispel the genuine concerns and confusion surrounding these issues and responsibility rests with the TGIE and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation. They must act swiftly to reassure people that the wording of the final statement faithfully reflects the democratically agreed original statement. Yet both bodies have been evasive and sloth-like in addressing this matter, the TSG desk in Dharamsala (reportedly headed by Mrs Kesang Takla) firstly stated that copies of the final report were available, then that they had none in stock, and finally that responsibility for distribution rested with the Friedrich Naumann Foundation. Having contacted them there has been a very uncharacteristic silence, while Tibet House in London, and its representative Mr Migyur Dorjee, appear to know nothing whatsoever about the report's current status. Something is clearly going on here and one is reminded that there are "gremlins in the basement" whenever Tibetan independence is raised, and these appear to be particularly tenacious and agile.

We call upon the convenors of this conference to address the serious concerns which have arisen as a result of this 'revised version' by releasing urgently the final report as agreed by delegates at the conference. Any further confusion would lead some to question the professionalism and efficiency of these respective departments and cast a shadow over the future integrity of the International Tibet Support Group Conferences.

In addition we would again request that they extend Independent Tibet Network the courtesy of featuring an explanation of our opposition to the conference statement, as requested on the 14th May 2000 and 10th June 2000 to Dr Rolf Freier. We believe such action will honour the democratic right to dissent while serving to present an accurate representation of events. At the moment all we have is muddle, administrative bungling and evasion.

Ends.

In closing may we assure your Holiness that our organisation has supported your efforts for some thirteen years, while campaigning actively for an independent Tibet. Our members remain committed to that aim and I am sure join me in expressing our respect and best wishes to you.

Yours most respectfully,

On Behalf of Independent Tibet Network