

Today is a momentous occasion marking the completion of 59 years of the establishment of the democratic system of the Tibetan people living in exile in the sacred land of India. To begin with, it was on the 2nd day of September in 1960 that the members of the first Tibetan parliament in exile took their oath of office and began to discharge their role as such. It was since that day that the noble democratic system of Tibet became established. It was later on the 2nd day of September in 1975 that the day began to be formally observed as Tibetan Democracy Day and the practice has remained uninterrupted ever since.

Speaking with regard to the establishment and development of democracy in countries all across the world, the general trend has been a history of popular uprisings, with people involved in the campaigns for it having to sacrifice their lives and livelihood comforts. Such campaigns have involved enduring hardships which often continued across generations before they finally yielded their ultimate results. However, the history of the establishment and development of Tibetan democracy has followed an entirely different trajectory. Democracy was, to the Tibetan people, a governmental system gifted by His Holiness the Great Fourteenth Dalai Lama. It would, therefore, be in order if the developmental trends in the exile Tibetan people's democratic system is recalled here briefly as a way also to remember the debt of gratitude we owe His Holiness the Dalai Lama for it.

Immediately after His Holiness the Great Fourteenth Dalai Lama, the supreme

temporal and spiritual leader of Tibet and a great champion of world peace, assumed

leadership responsibility over the Tibetan polity which was uniquely based on the

intertwining of religion and politics, He set out to modernize the existing social

system in the country by constituting a reform committee and especially appointing

its working committee members. For this purpose and in order to be able to carry out

a comprehensive survey of the existing situation, His Holiness newly established in

1952 a Reform Office. And He initiated a number of measures such as agrarian

reform in efforts directed at improving the social situation and the welfare of the

people in the country. However, even before a comprehensive set of reform measures

could be worked out, the coercive and intimidating actions of the occupation army of

the government of China that was entrenched in the country kept getting ever more

intrusive and repressive day by day, thereby keeping on revealing with ever greater

stark nakedness their true brutal nature. It calls culminated in the turbulent incident in

Tibet's capital Lhasa of the 10th of March 1959. The development led His Holiness

the Dalai Lama, accompanied by his entourage, to travel to the neighbouring country

of India as a temporary move aimed at working for the restoration of the religious,

political, and personal freedoms of the Tibetan nation. Faced with a multitude of such

insurmountable obstacles, His Holiness was rendered unable to implement his reform

agenda to the extent he had desired. His reform plans were therefore left to remain

outstanding for the time being. Nevertheless, immediately after coming into exile too,

His Holiness the Dalai Lama delivered a series of outstanding speeches laying out the

agenda of his future works aimed at the reunion of the Tibetan people left behind in

their Chinese occupied homeland and those who had fled into exile and on the

reestablishment in exile of a Tibetan government that would be in accord with the modern times. For example, on the 17th of November in 1959, during the fourth audience for the officials of the exiled Tibetan administration then initially established at Mussoorie, where he also resided, His Holiness thus said: "There is no possibility that any aspect of our previously existent situation in Tibet could continue in future; they all must necessarily undergo reform. The reason for this is that the situation across the wider outside world keeps undergoing tremendous changes. And it is vitally important that our path of future development should also keep pace with the global trends. The general interest of Tibet is of such importance that any sort of discrimination based on parochial considerations of social class, gender, and race should be entirely set aside. Everyone, so long as he or she is ethnically Tibetan,

should contribute his or her bit for the general good to the best of his or her skill and

capability. And one will definitely get considerations commensurate with the level of

one's learning. Hence, everyone should set aside his or her personal interests and

concerns and devote himself or herself to the general good of the greater cause not

just by words of mouth but also in deed by bringing out the best in himself or herself

by enhanced ways and means to achieve progress." Again, on the 3rd of February in

1960, when representatives from all the three provinces of Tibet and from all the

religious traditions of the country made a long-life prayer-offering and submitted to

Him a powerfully composed written oath of full adherence to his guidance during the

event at Bodh Gaya, His Holiness the Dalai Lama said: "Tibet should not remain as it

was before. It is important that the country should have a government that is a

democratic one based on the intertwining of religion and politics. Hence, there is a

need to institute a parliament whose members should be elected by popular vote and who should, therefore, represent the interests of the general populace. So, initially, we will have a member each presenting the four great traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, and three members each representing each of the three traditional provinces of Tibet. So, as soon as you get back to your places, you must present to me lists of names of candidates decided upon by whatever number of people there are who are learned and capable, patriotic and selfless, and who are worthy of being believed and trusted by the public from each of these proposed electoral constituencies.” Based on His desires expressed in a series of such speeches, the members of the first Tibetan parliament in exile were appointed under the seal of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and they took their oath of office on the 2nd of September in the year 1960. Since the establishment

for the first time of the Tibetan democratic system in exile on that day, 59 years have passed as of this day.

It was with an expansive view directed at the immediate as well as long-term interests and concerns of the Tibetan people that His Holiness the Dalai Lama has, in his profound guidance that defies all possibilities for repaying the gratitude, enabled us today to have a democratic system under which the nature of our administration system is based on principles of freedom, truthfulness, and equality. In the year 1961, the basic outline of a constitution for a future free Tibet was brought out. This was followed, in 1963, by the promulgation of a democratic constitution for Tibet. Later, in the year 1991, His Holiness the Dalai Lama made the Tibetan parliament in exile a meaningful lawmaking body. And on the 28th of June in 1991, His Holiness the Dalai Lama granted his assent to the Charter of the Tibetan People in Exile which had been

debated and passed by the 11th Tibetan parliament in exile. He thereby ensured the

makeover of the Central Tibetan Administration in exile into a system rooted in the

foundation of a fundamental charter which in turn was in tune with the modern

democratic ethos.

Later, in the year 2001, in keeping with the wishes of His Holiness the Dalai

Lama, the head of the executive branch of the Central Tibetan Administration, the

Kalon Tripa, began to be elected by popular vote of the Tibetan public. This was a

great achievement in taking a major step towards the development of the

democratization process of the Tibetan people living in exile. The Charter of the

Tibetan People in Exile continued to provide, as per the existing tradition, that

successive Dalai Lamas will remain the leader of government and head of state.

Nevertheless, in order to complete the process of full democratization, so that the people of Tibet would no longer need to continue to depend on a single individual, and keeping in view a multitude of other considerations in terms of the current as well as long term limitations, necessities, and reasons, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, on the 14th of March in 2011, made clear the finality of his decision to no longer retain his centuries-old historical responsibility as the political head and administrative leader of the Central Tibetan Administration. He made it clear that thenceforth in both political matters and administrative affairs, the responsibility shall rest on and be discharged by the concerned leaders elected directly by the Tibetan people. His Holiness conveyed these to the Tibetan Parliament in Exile in terms which were stated with absolute finality and which brooked no room for any reconsideration of his decision and made it clear that the framework of Charter of the Tibetan People in Exile should

be amended accordingly. Entreaties were made, nevertheless, that His Holiness the Dalai Lama still reconsidered his decision. But it was all futile and the entreaties were turned down. During the Second Tibetan National General Meeting too, entreaties were again made to urge His Holiness the Dalai Lama to resume the historical role of his successive reincarnations as the head of the Tibetan nation. But He remained adamant and did not accede to them. No option remained but to carry forward these wishes of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to devolve his powers. An additional meeting of the 14th Tibetan parliament in exile was accordingly held to suitably amend the Charter of the Tibetan People in Exile. Along with it, the Central Tibetan Administration was made a legally empowered sovereign body representative of all the Tibetan people and the symbol of their identity. And in keeping with the

provisions of Chapter XI of the Charter at that time, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, on

the 29th of May in 2011, granted his assent to the amendment Act. With that, He

brought to an end the nearly four-hundred-year history of sovereign political authority

over the whole of Tibet being held by the Gaden Phodrang institution. He thereby

devolved all his historical powers and roles to the leadership directly elected by the

Tibetan people. These elected leaders fully represent all the Tibetan people living in

Tibet as well as those living in exile and they remain fully committed to the noble

path of the democratic system that is based on the intertwining of the religious and

political genius of the Tibetan people. That, in turn, is the basis on which the elected

leadership continues the struggle for the just cause of the Tibetan people with a

commitment to carry it forward to a successful conclusion. It would not be out of

place to recognize with pride and contentment these developments as a high level of

achievement in the still ongoing Tibetan democratization process.

Likewise, grassroots democracy is of great importance. This was duly taken

note of and as a result village and group leaders upwards in the settlements, including

the members of the local Tibetan Freedom Movements and the members of the Local

Tibetan Assemblies, have since long been also elected by the local Tibetan people in

the exercise of their democratic electoral rights. And in order to ensure success and

steady working of these local Tibetan Assemblies, successive Tibetan Parliaments in

Exile have conducted training workshops from time to time for their members in the

field of developments in grassroots democracy. So far such workshops have been

organized for around 25 local Tibetan Assemblies as well as for a group of

representatives from independent bodies. Not only that, in an ongoing project that

continues to this day, delegations in groups of four members of the Tibetan

Parliament in Exile have visited countries abroad in official tours for the purpose of

imparting knowledge about democratic developments to the Tibetan people living

there as well as to make appeals on the issue of Tibet to the governments of these

countries. Just as the Sikyong of the Central Tibetan Administration and the members

of the Tibetan Parliament in Exile are directly elected by the Tibetan people by

popular franchise, so also are the Justice Commissioners of the Tibetan Justice

Commission, the kalons, and the heads of the autonomous bodies under the Central

Tibetan Administration by electoral poll by the Tibetan Parliament in Exile which is

constituted by representatives directly elected by the Tibetan people. The working of

our democratic system in exile has won admiration and praises from many

independent prominent personages from numerous countries and this remains a

continuing trend. Besides, it is a matter of great honour to us that there have even been people who have been saying that they would make efforts to introduce similar democratic practices in their own respective countries.

The process of holding elections, the rules under which they are held, and related matters are of great importance for any system that is based on democracy.

That is why during each of the 6th and the 7th Tibetan parliament in exile, the election rules were discussed, revised, and amended several times before finally being adopted. It is vitally important that the general masses of the Tibetan people gain a proper understanding of these rules so that they are able to fully exercise their democratic rights under them. The Chief Election Commissioner of the Tibetan

Election Commission has, with the primary aim to revise the election rules but also in

order to promote understanding of the rules, undertaken a number of tours. His

itineraries thus far have included places in the United States of America, Canada,

Switzerland, Paris, and the Tibetan settlements in South India. A decision has already

been made to start in a day or two a programme to promote awareness about and

understanding of the election rules among the Tibetan people living in Australia. We

urge everyone to realize its importance and take interest in it.

All tsampa -eating Tibetan people should take care to ensure that they do not

neglect by heedlessness the sacred and valuable democratic system that has been

gifted by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Rather, they should bring a sense of

responsibility over it and act to work towards its continued further progress and

success. On the other hand, uttering the word “democracy” only to pay a lip-service to

it while using it as a pretext to engage in parochial strife to thereby create turbulences

here and there in society, to commit blasphemy against His Holiness the Dalai Lama,

and such kinds of extremities would be most improper. To keep engaging in such

kinds of reprehensible conduct will not only fail to benefit anyone but it also carries

the grave danger of harming the fundamental cause of Tibet. There is no way such

kinds of conduct could be acknowledged as exercises of one's democratic rights. The

Charter of the Tibetan People in Exile enshrines the right of all Tibetan people to

exercise their democratic rights and privileges. Likewise, it should also be understood

that all of us also have the responsibility to protect the wellbeing and harmony of the

society in which we live. All of us, whoever we may be, should not preoccupy

ourselves by obsessing on a daily basis with our own personal misfortunes and

failings. Rather, we should think things from a broader outlook that is aimed at the

general good of the fundamental Tibetan cause and make our efforts from that perspective. So far, thanks to the kindness of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, we have been able to flourish under a stable system that has been completed with all the three pillars of democracy over the last 60 years. It has helped us to preserve our Tibetan ethnic identity, religion, culture and so on and achieve revival through progress in them. Likewise, we have been able to establish all kinds of democratic institutions large and small in the form of settlements, schools of all sizes and levels, monasteries and other places of religious worship and study, centres for the preservation of Tibetan culture in India, Nepal and Bhutan, as well as Offices of Tibet headed by representatives in other foreign countries. They are all democratic achievements for which we can justly be proud of. And so long as the issue of Tibet remains unsolved, we should strive to ensure their sustenance while continuing to make further progress

and development over these achievements. Along with it, each one of us should, over day and night, bear a sense of responsibility over the Tibetan community in exile and the fundamental Tibetan cause. If we are able to discipline ourselves to think and act with such an approach, there is no reason why unity will not be achieved within Tibetan society. When the sunshine of happiness of the reunion of the Tibetan people in Tibet and in exile finally dawns in future, resulting in those of us in exile returning to our homeland, the noble democratic system that we have managed to establish here will surely become the best gift we can offer to those who had remained back. Hence, there should be no loosening whatsoever in the silken knots of the ties that bind the Tibetan people together in their pledges of unity. This is the basis on which we should be able to keep making continuous progress and we take the opportunity provided by

this occasion to make an appeal from the depth of our hearts to everyone to bear this

firmly in mind.

Along with commemorating today the 59th anniversary of the establishment of

Tibetan democracy, we remember with solidarity the plight of our brethren who

remained back in their homeland. Ever since we lost our national territory into

Chinese hands, our brethren who remained there under the occupation rule had no

democratic rights to speak of whatsoever. Far from it, they have remained totally

deprived of even the freedoms that are inherent to a human being, such as the freedom

of speech, freedom of movement, freedom of religion, and so on which are

fundamental in human society. Rather, the occupying authorities of the communist

Chinese government have kept carrying out a policy of violent repression under

which the Tibetan people have endured, as they continue to today, persecution and

torture of unmitigated brutality. This is a state of affair which has continued over the last more than 60 years. All Tibetans living in exile remain in solidarity with their brethren living under and enduring the occupation rule with regard to their resolute yearning for freedom.

Over the last 60 years, a number of countries, especially the trio of India, Nepal, and Bhutan, as well as numerous foreign aid agencies, have extended cooperation, support, and help in the preservation of the ethnic Tibetan identity and in the revival, promotion, and practice of our religion and culture, linguistic heritage and so on. To them as well as to all those who support the Tibetan cause, we take the opportunity provided by this occasion to offer our heartfelt gratitude on behalf of all Tibetans living in Tibet and those in exile.

Also, Millions of Hong Kongers have been peacefully protesting for

democracy and freedom in Hong Kong from last few months. The Tibetan

Parliament-in-Exile stands in solidarity with the people of Hong Kong.

Finally, we offer our prayers that His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the patron

deity of all beings in the Three Realms of Existence but especially of us of the

Snowland of Tibet, continue to live for a hundred aeons, with all his desires being

accomplished without any obstacle and with spontaneity, with the just cause of Tibet

being resolved in all speediness.

By The Tibetan Parliament in Exile

2 September 2019

* In case of any discrepancy between this English translation and its Tibetan original,

the latter should be considered authoritative and final for all purposes.

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