

The Dalai Lama's Mussorie Press Conference

June 20, 1959

At his first press conference in India, on 20 June 1959 at Mussoorie, the Dalai Lama told the story of the Tibetan rebellion in his own words. The following statement was issued to the newspapermen before the Dalai answered questions:

Ever since my arrival in India, I have been receiving almost everyday sad and distressing news of the suffering and inhuman treatment of my people. I have heard daily, with a heavy heart, of their increasing agony and affliction, their harassment and persecution and of the terrible deportation and execution of innocent men. These have made me realise forcibly that the time has manifestly arrived when in the interests of my people and religion and to save them from the danger of near-annihilation, I must not keep silent any longer but must frankly and plainly tell the world the truth about Tibet and appeal to the conscience of the peace-loving and civilised nations.

THE TRAGIC HAPPENINGS

To understand and appreciate the significance and implication of the recent tragic happenings in Tibet, it is necessary to refer to the main events which have occurred in the country since 1950. It is recognised by every independent observer that Tibet had virtually been independent by enjoying and exercising all rights of sovereignty, whether internal or external. This has also been impliedly admitted by the Communist Government of China, for the very structure, terms and conditions of the so-called agreement of 1951 conclusively show that it

was an agreement between two independent and sovereign States. It follows, therefore, that when the Chinese armies violated the territorial integrity of Tibet they were committing a flagrant act of aggression. The agreement which followed the invasion of Tibet was also trust upon its people and government by the threat of arms. It was never accepted by them of their own free will. The consent of the government was secured under duress and at the point of the bayonet. My representatives were compelled to sign the agreement under threat of further military operations against Tibet by the invading armies of China leading to utter ravage and ruin of the country. Even the Tibetan seal which was affixed to the agreement was not seal of my representatives but a seal copied and fabricated by the Chinese authorities in Peking, and kept in their possession ever since."

REIGN OF TERROR

" While I and my government did not voluntarily accept the agreement, we were obliged to acquiesce in it and decided to abide by the terms and conditions in order to save my people and country from the danger of total destruction. It was, however, clear from the very beginning that the Chinese had no intention of carrying out the agreement. Although they had solemnly undertaken to maintain my status and power as the Dalai Lama, they did not lose any opportunity to undermine my authority and sow dissensions among my people. In fact, they compelled me, situated as I was, to dismiss my Prime Ministers under threat of their execution without trial because they had in all honesty and sincerity resisted the unjustified usurpation of power by the representatives of the Chinese Government in Tibet. Far from carrying out the agreement, they began deliberately to pursue a course of policy which was diametrically opposed to the terms and conditions which they had themselves laid down. Thus commenced a reign of terror which

finds parallels in the history of Tibet. Forced labour and compulsory exactions, a systematic persecution of the people, plunder and confiscation of property belonging to individuals and monasteries, and execution of certain leading men in Tibet-these are the glorious achievements of the Chinese rule in Tibet. During all this time, patiently and sincerely I endeavoured to appease my people and to calm down their feelings and at the same time tried my best to persuade the Chinese authorities in Lhasa to adopt a policy of conciliation and friendliness. In spite of repeated failures, I persisted in this policy till the last day when it became impossible for me to render any useful service to my people by remaining in Tibet. It is in these circumstances that I was obliged to leave my country in order to save it from further danger and disaster.

NEUTRAL INVESTIGATION

I wish to make it clear that I have made these assertions against the Chinese officials in Tibet in the full knowledge of their gravity because I know them to be true. Perhaps the Peking Government are not fully aware of the facts of the situation, but if they are not prepared to accept these statements, let them agree to an investigation on the point by an international commission. On our part, I and my government will readily agree to abide by the verdict of such an impartial body.

CHINESE BREAK PROMISES

It is necessary for me to add that before I visited India in 1956, it had become increasingly clear to me that my policy of amity and tolerance had totally failed to create any impression on the representatives of the Chinese Government in Tibet. Indeed, they had frustrated every measure adopted by me to remove the bitter resentment felt by my people and to bring about a peaceful atmosphere in the country for the

purpose of carrying out the necessary reforms. As I was unable to do anything for the benefit of my people, I had practically made up my mind when I came to India not to return to Tibet until there was a manifest change in the attitude of the Chinese authorities. I, therefore, sought the advice of the Prime Minister of India, who has always shown me unfailing kindness and consideration. After his talk with the Chinese Prime Minister and on the strength of the assurances given by him on behalf of China, Mr. Nehru advised me to change my decision. I followed his advice and returned to Tibet in the hope that conditions would change substantially for the better, and I have no doubt that my hopes would have been realised if the Chinese authorities had on their part carried out the assurances which the Chinese Prime Minister had given to the Prime Minister of India. It was, however, painfully clear soon after my return that the representatives of the Chinese Government had no intention to adhere to their promises. The natural and inevitable result was that the situation steadily grew worse until it became impossible to control the spontaneous upsurge of my people against the tyranny and oppression of the Chinese authorities

NOT OPPOSED TO REFORMS

At this point I wish to emphasise that I and my Government have never been opposed to the reforms which are necessary in the social, economic and political systems prevailing in Tibet. We have no desire to disguise the fact that ours is an ancient society and that we must introduce immediate changes in the interests of the people of Tibet. In fact, during the last nine years several reforms were proposed by me and my government, but every time these measures were strenuously opposed by the Chinese in spite of popular demand for them, with the result that nothing was done for the betterment of the social and economic conditions of the people. In particular, it was my earnest

desire that the system of land tenure should be radically changed without further delay and the large landed estates acquired by the State on payment of compensation for distribution amongst the tillers of the soil. But the Chinese authorities deliberately put every obstacle in the way of carrying out this just and reasonable reform. I desire to lay stress on the fact that we, as firm believers in Buddhism, welcome change and progress consistent with the genius of our people and the rich traditions of our country, but the people of Tibet will stoutly resist any victimisation, sacrilege and plunder in the name of reforms, a policy which is now being enforced by the representative of the Chinese Government in Lhasa."

A CLEAR PICTURE

"I have attempted to present a clear and unvarnished picture of the situation in Tibet. I have endeavoured to tell the entire civilised world the real truth about Tibet, the truth which must ultimately prevail, however strong the forces of evil may appear to be today. I also wish to declare that we Buddhist firmly and steadfastly believe in peace and desire to live in peace with all the peoples and countries of the world. Although recent actions and policies of the Chinese authorities in Tibet have created strong feelings of bitterness and resentment against the Government of China, we, Tibetans, lay and monk alike, do not cherish any feelings of enmity and hatred against the great Chinese people. We wish to live in peace and ask for peace and goodwill from all countries of the world. I and my government are, therefore, fully prepared to welcome a peaceful and amicable solution of the present tragic problem, provided that such a solution guarantees the preservation of the rights and powers which Tibet has enjoyed and exercised without any interference prior to 1950. We must also insist on the creation of a favourable climate by the immediate adoption of the essential measures

as a condition precedent to negotiations for a peaceful settlement. We ask for peace and for a peaceful settlement, but we must also ask for the maintenance of the status and the rights of our State and people.