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—
Chair

Mr. Scott Reid

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

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• (1305)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP)): I call the meeting to order.

I'm Wayne Marston, vice-chair of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. This is our 64th meeting.

I want to welcome our guest representing the Tibetan Youth Congress, Dhondup Lhadar. As an individual witness with him today is Tsewang Dhondup. Welcome to the committee.

Just for the information of the members of the committee, we'll have interpretation read to us in English directly, and that should speed up things a bit.

I'll call upon our first witness to begin.

Mr. Dhondup Lhadar (Vice-President, Central Executive Committee, Tibetan Youth Congress)(Interpretation): First of all, on behalf of all Tibetans and particularly the Tibetan Youth Congress, which is the largest non-governmental organization, I'd like to thank you for giving me this opportunity to address this important parliamentary session.

Acts of aggression on Tibet by the People's Republic of China started in 1949 soon after its formation, and by 1959 the PRC had consolidated its illegitimate rule over Tibet. This resulted in His Holiness the Dalai Lama's flight into exile and the establishment of the exile Tibetan government in India.

Over half a century of China's rule in Tibet has led to the death of more than 1.2 million Tibetans due to starvation, execution, torture, and long-term imprisonment.

The latest act of protest by Tibetans through self-immolation is a powerful non-violent resistance and the highest form of sacrifice a human being can make. Between February 2000 and January 2013 there have been 99 confirmed cases of self-immolation protests, 82 in 2012 alone. In this month of January there have been four self-immolations.

With such a surge in these protests and concerns that this number will only increase, there is an urgent need to explain these actions to the outside world. Therefore I thank you for this opportunity to address the House on these self-immolations taking place on the Tibetan plateau.

The Tibetan Youth Congress recognizes these acts as the ultimate form of non-violent resistance against China's occupation. Of the 99 reported cases, 86 died and the whereabouts and physical condition of 13 remain unknown. The oldest was a 65-year-old grandfather, and the youngest was 15 years old. The average age of the self-immolators is about 25.

Apart from deaths due to self-immolations, there also have been reported deaths due to the consumption of poison and jumping into rivers.

The self-immolations have taken place all across the Tibetan plateau and have included monks, nuns, parents, students, nomads, farmers, and intellectuals. Some of the self-immolators left behind children as young as a few months old.

A 32-year old mother of 4, Rinchen, died after setting her body on fire near a military camp in eastern Tibet. Her eldest child is 13, while the youngest is a few months old. The children became orphans, as Rinchen's husband had passed away a year before.

A father of two, Tsegial, 27 years old, self-immolated on the eve of the Chinese Communist Party's 18th National Congress on November 7, 2012, in Bankar Village in Driru County in Kham in eastern Tibet. Tsegial was immediately taken into police custody subsequent to his actions and succumbed to his injuries and prolonged neglect and ill-treatment in custody. During his detention he reportedly received no treatment for his burns and finally died on the evening of November 18 in police custody. Details of this incident surfaced a month after his protest. Tsegial left behind two children, a six-year-old and an eight-month-old infant.

On January 22, 2013, Kunchok Kyab set himself on fire in Bora, in Amdo, northeastern Tibet, to protest against China's rule. He left behind a nine-month old baby.

The Beijing government's response to the spate of self-immolations has been stepping up security, intensifying oppression, arrest, detention, torture, intimidation, and aggressively vilifying the self-immolators by calling them terrorists and mentally sick and stating that the protests were committed by people who previously had been punished for wrongdoings such as whoring, gambling, and burglary, or who were deep in debt because of gambling. The Beijing government also resorted to corrupt practices by detaining spouses of protestors for their refusal to accept bribes to claim that their husbands or wives self-immolated due to family disputes. It also offered cash rewards of \$8,000 or \$30,000 for intelligence and information about impending or past self-immolations.

In many cases, Chinese authorities have confiscated the bodies of self-immolators and barred family members from carrying out religious rites and rituals after their death. Security forces arrest witnesses, family members, and relatives of those who have chosen to take this non-violent action. Citizen journalists who have relayed information to the outside world have been arrested, tortured, and sentenced to long prison terms. In a further use of intimidation, China's supreme court, the top prosecution body, and police issued a joint legal opinion whereby the charge of intentional murder should apply to anyone urging Tibetans to set themselves alight.

● (1310)

Efforts at damage control and attempts to avert international criticism and scrutiny also included blaming the exile community, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and the Tibetan Youth Congress for instigating these protests. Earlier this month, China's official Xinhua News Agency it said that police investigation found that the self-immolation by a 26-year-old in Gansu Province's Hezuo City was "masterminded by key members of the 'Tibetan Youth Congress' of the overseas Dalai clique".

Additionally, to hide the real situation from the world, foreign media are banned from Tibet and travel is curtailed for non-Chinese tourists. Within Tibet Beijing has imposed strict restrictions on freedom of movement for Tibetans in their own homeland.

If there are any questions as to why such an unprecedented number of Tibetans have resorted to this form of protest, then the last testaments left by some of the self-immolators provide answers. As poet, writer, and blogger Gudrup, a 41-year-old who self-immolated in October 2012, said:

Since China is uninterested in the well being of the Tibetan people, we are sharpening our nonviolent movement. We are declaring the reality of Tibet by burning our own bodies to call for freedom of Tibet. ... We will win the battle through truth, by shooting the arrows of our lives, by using the bow of our mind.

In their last message, Choephak Kyab and Sonam, both in their twenties, who set themselves ablaze on April 19, 2012, said that since the Chinese occupation, Tibetans suffer without basic human rights and it was for this reason, and in order for peace to prevail on earth, that they were offering their lives by setting themselves on fire. They said that the suffering of Tibetans without basic human rights is far worse than the suffering that they would endure when they set themselves on fire. They said, "You must do as we have written. Even if the Chinese take us away, do not do anything. We will be happy if nobody gets harmed because of us."

Likewise, in his last message, Tamding Thar, in his fifties, who self-immolated on June 15, 2012, said:

I am setting myself on fire as an offering of light with hope that His Holiness the Dalai Lama will return to Tibet, that peace will prevail on earth, and that Tibet will be ruled by Tibetans.

On 19 February 2012, 18-year-old Nangdrol set himself on fire. In his last message he said, "May Tibetan people be free from China's oppressive rule. There is immense suffering under China's rule, and this suffering is unbearable. There is no way to further endure this Chinese occupation, its terrible rule, this torture without trace."

The fundamental aspirations and reasons for the self-immolators to choose this non-violent action are clear from these messages. The Chinese government and the world at large should not misinterpret

these acts as ethnic conflicts or China's flawed repressive policies or simply as a struggle for religious freedom. The immolations are a symptom of a far greater problem: the Chinese occupation of Tibet. As long as China continues to occupy Tibet and oppress the Tibetan people, they will continue to resist.

Additionally, supporting China's aggressive condemnation of the immolations as an act of violence is to blame the victim while completely neglecting to see the violence of the oppressor. Rather than debating the ethics of immolation, we need to look at the horrible conditions that motivated these actions. Without solving the root problem, the immolations will persist because Beijing's rule of over half a century has only resulted in cultural destruction, economic marginalization, and irreparable environmental damage.

Furthermore, forcing the Tibetans to denounce His Holiness the Dalai Lama and undermine his spiritual leadership only exacerbates the grim situation. Tibetans place high hopes on democratic countries such as yours to pressure China to respect and fulfill the aspirations of Tibetans who set themselves on fire. To this effect, I would like to request this Parliament to address the recommendations that follow.

The first is to send a fact-finding parliamentary delegation into Tibet.

The next is to issue a statement and pass a resolution in the Canadian Parliament condemning China's continued occupation and its oppression of the Tibetan people, leading to self-immolation, harassment of relatives and friends, and a crackdown on citizen journalists and human rights defenders.

Finally, recognize that Canadian companies doing business with China, such as Continental Minerals, Lara Exploration, Eldorado Gold, Inter-Citic Minerals, Sterling Group Ventures, Bombardier, and Vancouver-based China Gold International Resources—as well as the Nexen-CNOOC deal, etc.—are indirectly funding PRC's human rights abuses and its undermining of Tibet's unique culture, language, tradition, and fragile ecosystem.

● (1315)

I put these recommendations before you on behalf of six million Tibetans, especially those who have set themselves on fire. This resistance movement in Tibet will continue unless those in the world who have power break their silence and, above all, hold China accountable for forcing Tibetans to take such drastic actions. By speaking up, you are not only standing in solidarity with the Tibetan cause but also defending your own democratic values.

The world recognized and supported Thich Quang Duc, who self-immolated in 1963 to protest against discrimination and mistreatment of Buddhist monks in Vietnam, which ultimately led to the end of Diem's regime. In the same way, I strongly urge the world to support Tibet's struggle for freedom and to stand in solidarity with those Tibetans who have set themselves on fire so that their basic aspirations are met and this non-violent action does not spiral out of control.

History condemns those who walked silently away from holocausts and genocides. The tragedy of Tibet is playing out before a largely mute world audience. To believe that the People's Republic of China cannot be brought to book for its illegal rule in Tibet is to slide onto the wrong side of history.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Government of Canada and its people for allowing a large number of exiled Tibetans to reside here and make this country their second home. The fact that you have given me this opportunity to stand before you is a clear indication of your support to Tibet and its people in their pursuit of freedom. It also shows Canada's strength and courage to face China.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston): Is that the conclusion of the witnesses' testimony?

Ms. Sherab Aathysang (Translator, As an Individual): That is the conclusion for the first witness.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston): Are you going to go into the second one?

Ms. Sherab Aathysang: Yes.

Next is the statement of Tsewang Dhondup.

Mr. Tsewang Dhondup (As an Individual) (Interpretation): I arrived in Dharamsala on May 25, 2009, as I wanted the world to know—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston): Excuse me. Are you planning on reading the entire statement? We would like to have enough time for our members to ask questions. Could you get it as condensed as you can?

Mr. Tsewang Dhondup (Interpretation): Is it possible that I could have a little time to speak and be interpreted?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston): Yes.

Mr. Tsewang Dhondup (Interpretation): First of all, I'd like to thank the foreign affairs subcommittee for the opportunity to speak in front of you.

I'd like to say that there are no human rights in Tibet. I myself am evidence, and I'd like to express that as a witness.

China accuses Tibetans of not following His Holiness the Dalai Lama. It is not true.

In Tibet, there are actually two sources of livelihood. Some people lead a nomadic life, and some people farm. China does not allow that to happen either.

For example, I myself am a farmer and I cannot actually grow grain on the land. China would force us to grow wood and grass.

To do that, they actually give us little support in order for us to grow those things.

Recently there has been huge stress from repressive policies inside Tibet. It actually started in the district and is now in the villages. Finally, in 2008, the Chinese army would come into our village and go to each family's unit and asked the family members to sign something saying they would like to go against His Holiness's wishes. If we did not do that, we would be punished and we would not be given any sanctions or help. Tibetans would never do that, because we consider His Holiness a spiritual leader of Tibet.

Tibetans would never do that. We would never go against His Holiness the Dalai Lama or the Panchen Lama, but if someone did not go against them, their family members would disappear. Either the father, the mother, or members of the family would disappear.

● (1320)

They are Communists. We regard highly His Holiness the Dalai Lama or Panchen Lama. Actually, China's policies are very bad.

Because of the ongoing repressive policies against Tibetans living in Tibet, we were forced to protest in 2008. I did not actually break any law; I just exercised my right at that time.

I simply exercised my right on that day, March 24. I was only trying to save a monk and protect him. At that time there were two shots fired, and one went through my back and pierced through my kidney in the front. The other one, after I had taken about three steps, went through my forearm and shattered my forearm bones.

The high lamas, the spiritual heads of the monastery, would advise all Tibetans to remain non-violent, and would also constantly advise them to remain peaceful, but those highly regarded lamas would then be poisoned or blinded, or they would be mentally tortured. Sometimes they would be imprisoned for two or three months, and they would finally disappear and also lose their lives.

I stand here today on behalf of the Tibetans inside Tibet to talk about the horrifying situation that's happening inside Tibet. My situation is actually very small in comparison to the lives that have been lost and the torture that people have experienced inside Tibet.

The Chinese government tries to insinuate that Tibetans living inside Tibet are happy, that they are liberated and live normal lives. However, that is not true. The suffering of Tibetan people inside is similar to imprisonment, similar to staying in a prison setting.

For example, in Tibet, in the valleys there is what's called the grass worm. Tibetans live on that, but the Chinese would not even allow them to dig them. If you continue to do so—dig the worm and not sign the agreement that the Chinese government puts in—then your support, which is about 500 yuan, would be lessened, and maybe in the future you might be imprisoned.

● (1325)

Tibetans inside live in a very desperate situation. Human beings consider the self-life as having the highest value, and people are actually sacrificing their own lives by setting themselves on fire. It's not just one or two; there have now been more than a hundred. Tibetans living inside Tibet are forcefully and desperately sacrificing their lives. Not only that, but the family members of those who have self-immolated are actually blamed for instigating these horrifying deaths.

● (1330)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston): We allotted 14 minutes of time for the witnesses so that there could be questions. We're up to 24 minutes. Is it possible to condense it down just a bit? Just so you understand as well, his written testimony, because we've all received it, will be part of our record as well.

Has he finished it?

Ms. Sherab Aathysang: Do you want me to read it through?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston): No, you don't need to read it. We have a written copy. We'll receive that as part of the testimony for the record, but we would really like to get to the questions from our members.

Mr. Tsewang Dhondup (Interpretation): Thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston): Thank you.

We'll begin with Mr. Sweet, on behalf of the government.

Before you start, we probably can get in five-minute rounds. We're going to go a little bit past one o'clock to do that.

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for your testimony.

We have limited time for questions, so I'll try to make them brief.

Mr. Dhondup, I can't imagine the pain you've gone through being shot while trying to save a monk—your friend—and of course not being successful at that, and also seeing the suffering of your people.

I wanted to ask you something. The People's Republic of China is trying to make us believe that these immolations are a plot, a strategy by the Dalai Lama and individual people in maybe the Tibetan Youth Congress, etc.

You were there in 2009. Is that the case? Explain to us the motivation that these individual people have for this most fierce form of protest.

Mr. Tsewang Dhondup (Interpretation): Is that a question?

Mr. David Sweet: Yes. What is the motivation of the individuals? Why do they do that? Is it because they've been pressured by some group, or because they have their own motivation?

Mr. Tsewang Dhondup (Interpretation): The main reason for self-immolation is that there are no human rights in Tibet. We are not able to exercise our own right to live.

Ms. Sherab Aathysang: The other witness would like to make a statement as well.

● (1335)

Mr. Dhondup Lhadar (Interpretation): I'd like to first thank you very much for the opportunity to speak in front of you today.

The people inside Tibet who self-immolate do so for two main reasons. One is that we consider Tibet to be an independent country. They do not agree with China's occupation of Tibet and are calling for an end to it.

Secondly, China is destroying our Tibetan culture and our environment. Tibetans are not able to exercise their own rights inside Tibet, and they consider His Holiness to be the spiritual leader of Tibet.

Mr. Tsewang Dhondup (Interpretation): His Holiness the Dalai Lama always preaches for world peace and always propagates peace among Tibetans inside Tibet. Tibetans do not wish to harm anyone; they take away only their own lives.

Mr. David Sweet: I think I have the answer now, Chair. I just wanted to be clear that the decisions made by the immolators are their own and that it's not because of some pressure they're receiving from some other outside group.

I just wanted to make sure that was on the record, and I believe that's the answer we got from the witnesses.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston): Thank you.

We'll move now to the official opposition. Ms. Nash is here.

I'll just let you know that Ms. Nash has to dash off away to practise for question period to take on the government. There's no partisanship here at all, of course.

Go ahead, Ms. Nash.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for permitting me to substitute in the subcommittee on human rights.

Welcome to our guests.

I am the member of Parliament for Parkdale—High Park, which is home to the largest Tibetan community in Canada. One thing I'm well aware of is that the vast majority of those members of the Tibetan Canadian community have come here as refugees. I've heard many stories in addition to what our witnesses have said today about human rights violations. It is an issue of great concern to me as a member of Parliament and to our community, and I believe it is a matter that should be of concern to all in our country.

Mr. Sweet and I are members of the Parliamentary Friends of Tibet committee. Mr. Sweet is the chair. I'm the vice-chair. It is a committee that has been very active. Last year, under the leadership of Senator Di Nino, we hosted here in Canada an international parliamentary conference on Tibet, and parliamentarians came from around the world.

It's an issue that Canada has been very active on. We also voted unanimously, I believe in 2006—I could be wrong—to make His Holiness the Dalai Lama an honorary Canadian citizen, something of which we are very proud. That has been the kind of activity we've had here.

However, recently Canada signed the Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement with China, the FIPA, and we have been developing a closer trading relationship with China.

My question is twofold. First, do you think the Canadian government is doing enough to speak out against the human rights violations in Tibet? Second, what role can Canada play to help open negotiations between representatives from the Tibetan community and the Chinese government to help resolve the ongoing situation in Tibet?

Those are my two questions. Are we doing enough? What could we do to help the dialogue?

● (1340)

Mr. Dhondup Lhadar (Interpretation): I'd like to say that there is a strong ongoing support from the Canadian government in terms of the Tibet issue. His Holiness has been awarded an honorary citizenship. Also, on behalf of all the Tibetans, I'd like to say thank you to the Canadian government for also allowing Tibetans to reside in Canada and call it home. A few days ago, the foreign affairs committee actually signed a five-point agreement on the Tibet issue, and we'd like to thank you for that as well.

Up until now there have been about 99 self-immolators in Tibet, and I'd like to request that the Canadian government consider their hopes and aspirations and the reason these people have self-immolated. I also urge Parliament to actually issue a statement and also allow media inside Tibet to look into situations that are arising in Tibet and to force China to stop the repressive policy against Tibetan people in Tibet.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston): Excuse me; we're done for this round. We're a minute past the time for that particular question.

We have to go now to a government member.

Go ahead, Ms. Grewal.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for their time.

It is very sad to sit here and listen to your horrific stories, and my heart goes out to all of you. Nobody should go through this. All human beings in this world should enjoy human rights. That's a basic right, and no human rights should be violated anywhere in the world.

Speaking on our government's record, I would like to say that our Prime Minister was the first prime minister to meet the Dalai Lama in his Hill office. The Prime Minister spoke out on human rights repeatedly when he was in China, so much so that he was attacked in the Chinese media. Minister Kenney, the minister of immigration, was a key speaker defending Tibet at last year's international convention. Minister Baird recently spoke out on Tibet as well.

A significant increase in surveillance and Chinese intervention has been reported with regard to Tibet's religious freedom. This includes the presence of state officials within monasteries and nunneries. What effect does this have on the religious freedom of monks and nuns and religious people in Tibet?

My second question is a very short one. In 2009, Canada participated in China's first universal periodic review. We made several recommendations on the subjects of judicial reform and the protection of human rights, one of which was accepted there. With the second periodic universal review coming up, do you feel that China has improved in these areas? What do you anticipate for this universal review report? Could you please comment on this?

Thank you.

● (1345)

Mr. Tsewang Dhondup (Interpretation): I'd like to respond to the first question.

I'd like to speak to the hearts and minds of the monks and nuns inside the monasteries and the people living inside Tibet. I myself am the evidence. I'm a recent escapee from Tibet. It's unimaginable that basic human rights have been snatched away. It almost appears that we are actually living in a cell. Everywhere you go it's guarded. Each and every Tibetan that I could speak of is probably feeling as though they are imprisoned for their lives. There's no way out.

The sole purpose of having a monastery inside Tibet is to actually educate on religious freedom, but there are cameras all over the monastery. We Tibetans do not have even the same rights as a wild animal living in the mountains.

● (1350)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston): Excuse me; I'm sorry, but the time has now elapsed. We're another minute over, and I have to go to Professor Cotler. I'm sure you'll be able to get your points in there.

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I also would like to thank the witnesses.

I want to address my question to you, Mr. Lhadar, because my question flows out of your testimony.

You made certain specific suggestions and recommendations as to what we might do. One is to send a fact-finding parliamentary delegation into Tibet. If we could do that, I think it would be an important initiative.

The next is to issue a statement and pass a resolution in the Canadian Parliament on the matters, as you've suggested.

Then, in referring to the Canadian companies doing business with China, you made reference to the Nexen-CNOOC deal, the takeover by a Chinese state enterprise, CNOOC, of Nexen here in Canada.

Do you believe that type of arrangement is, in effect, as you put it, "indirectly funding" the PRC's human rights abuses and undermining the Tibetan cause?

Mr. Dhondup Lhadar (Interpretation): The reason I requested a fact-finding delegation into Tibet is that the media are restricted from actually entering. Not only the self-immolators but also the family members have been arrested and punished. The self-immolators are now forced, since there is no other way, to consume poison or jump into the river. Those at monasteries are also being stopped. They are even unable to listen to the media, such as Voice of America and Radio Free Asia.

I would also like to say that there are a lot of mining companies established in Tibet, and they're further damaging the environment. The residents where the mining is happening are even forced to remain without their agreement.

We therefore urge the Canadian Parliament to propagate basic human rights in Tibet and help further develop the exercise of basic human rights in Tibet.

• (1355)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston): That's the limit of Mr. Cotler's time.

Mr. Schellenberger is next.

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, for being here today.

From your presentations that I've heard so far, it seems that setting yourself on fire has not necessarily worked. When you protest, you want a positive result. It's my assessment that China does not care about this type of protest. Would there not be a better way to protest? That's one thing.

Here are my questions. What has been the response of Chinese authorities to the self-immolations? What is your assessment of this response? Also, what minimum steps would you like to see China take in order to address the problem of self-immolation?

Mr. Tsewang Dhondup (Interpretation): I'd like to pledge before the subcommittee and request... The situation is desperate in Tibet. Tibet continues to suffer against the repressive Chinese policies and occupation. I'd like to pledge that if the Canadian Parliament and each country in the world could investigate what is happening within Tibet.... As you see, China actually stopped issuing visas to tourists altogether, and they're not able to come in and look into the situation inside Tibet.

Tibetan people are very peaceful people. They do not wish to harm anybody. That's the reason there are a lot of self-immolations.

There are other ways to propagate our cause. One could be like the people in the world who have actually carried out terrorist acts and bombed a whole province or district. We Tibetans are very peaceful. We do not wish to do that. The only way to actually get the world to pledge to look into Tibet's situation is to take our own lives.

• (1400)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston): Perhaps I could just jump in at this moment.

Members, we're very close to our official adjournment. I would like us to extend by about seven minutes in order to allow Mr. Jacob to get his question in.

Do I have the acceptance of the committee? Okay.

Go ahead, Mr. Jacob.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Mr. Lhadar.

In order to stop the phenomenon of self-immolation among Tibetans—

[English]

Ms. Sherab Aathysang: I'm sorry; I do not understand French.

Mr. Pierre Jacob: You don't understand French.

Ms. Sherab Aathysang: No.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston): We're going to extend our meeting past our normal recess time to allow Mr. Jacob and the response.

Oh, she didn't have translation.

Ms. Sherab Aathysang: I'm so sorry; the other witness would like to speak for one minute.

Mr. Dhondup Lhadar (Interpretation): The question asked previously is very important, and I wish to respond—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston): No, excuse me, we're going to go to Mr. Jacob. He is going to put his question.

In the response to his question, if you'd like to add anything during that, we'd be glad to listen.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Jacob: I will start over.

In order to stop the phenomenon of self-immolation among Tibetans, Chinese authorities arrest those who encourage others to carry out this act. Is that tactic really being used, and if so, when did it start?

And do the Chinese authorities use other tactics in order to stop the self-immolation phenomenon among Tibetans?

[English]

Ms. Sherab Aathysang: Can you repeat the question?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Jacob: Do the Chinese authorities use other tactics in order to stop the self-immolation phenomenon among Tibetans?

[English]

Mr. Dhondup Lhadar (Interpretation): Among the tactics that the Chinese government uses to stop self-immolation in Tibet, they provide awards to the friends and families who they blame for actually helping sacrifice those lives.

In order to stop the self-immolations that occur in Tibet, they should look into the reasons these activities are carried out.

For example, there is Tulku Sopa Rinpoche, who self-immolated, and the disciple Namkha Jigme, who has been imprisoned for trying to advocate and let the world know about the self-immolation and the reason to carry on this activity. Also, there are the cases of Tenzin Wangmo, who also self-immolated, and of Lho Yonten Gyamtsho, who tried to let the world know about the reasons she had carried on this activity and who has been imprisoned for about seven years. Her whereabouts are unknown as well.

As an example, this picture that I am holding is Tsering Kyi. She set herself on fire. She was a young student. The family members tried to obtain the dead body, but China basically confiscated the dead body and said that if they wished to receive the body, they would have to sign an agreement that they would like to go against the wishes of His Holiness and that her self-immolation had nothing to do with the political situation inside Tibet. The family did not agree to that, especially the mother.

● (1405)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston): This is the time in the meeting that is most difficult for the chair, because our time has expired.

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Chair—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston): Just one second, Mr. Sweet. I will go right to you.

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Lhadar has something important that he wanted to add.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston): That's just what I was going to ask.

Mr. David Sweet: Thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston): I was going to give him the opportunity.

You wanted to add one point, Mr. Lhadar, that you didn't quite finish in the last round of questions. If you would like to do that now, please do so.

Mr. Dhondup Lhadar (Interpretation): I just wanted to respond to the second question, regarding the Chinese government's use of tactics to stop self-immolation.

As I have said, rewards are being given out to families that would agree to state that they have instigated the activities of those self-immolators. Recently, in 2012, China set out seven points, one of which stated that if you did not agree to the fact that you actually instigated these activities, then your job would be at stake and you would not be able to actually receive some of the rights and freedoms given by the government. It also stated that Tibetan people could not donate to the self-immolators to help them carry out those activities.

I'd like to pledge before the committee that it's evident that self-immolators are doing so simply for the cause of Tibet. As I mentioned, since that activity may not be possible—right now China is actually trying to stop self-immolation—another way is to jump into the river or to drink poison.

As you can see, just sacrificing their own lives for their country is not quite possible in their own country. This is the desperate state of the situation in Tibet.

● (1410)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Marston): Thank you. We have reached the end of our time.

I want to thank you, Mr. Lhadar and Mr. Dhondup, for bringing this testimony before the committee.

This committee is seized with our concerns about what is happening in Tibet. I want to assure you that the members present, from all parties, are very concerned and very troubled by what we hear. Your testimony is an important part of our study looking into this situation. If you have anything to add that you haven't given us today, be sure to send it to the clerk.

Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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