

Exiled Tibetans plan protest March to Tibet ahead of Beijing Olympics

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**Presidents of five organizations at the press conference in New Delhi on 4th January.
Photo by Tenzin Dasel/Phayul**

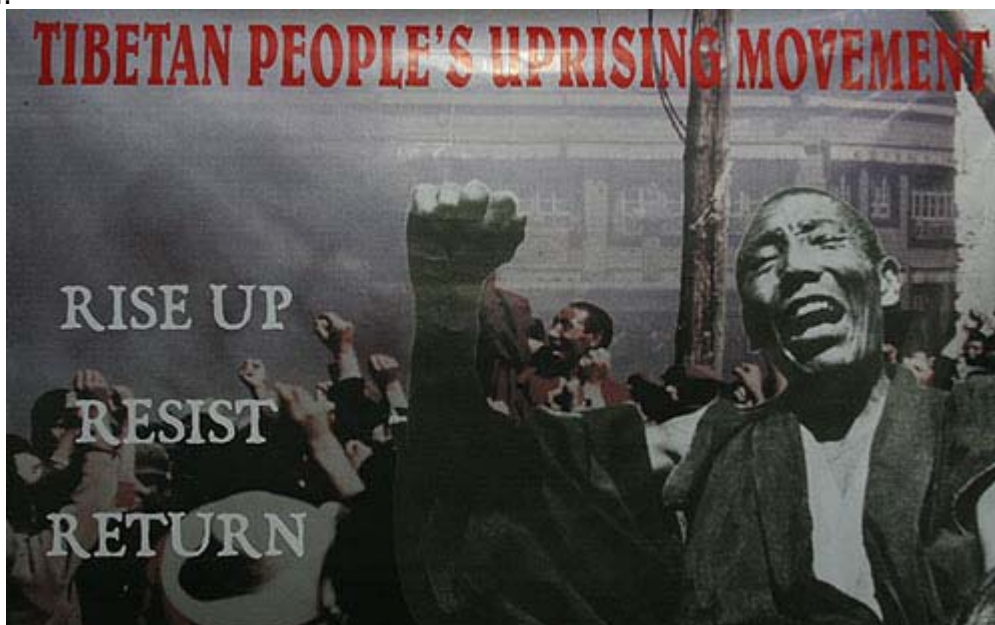
New Delhi, January 4: Exiled Tibetans led by five organizations have announced a plan to take a major protest march from India to Tibet demanding China for the peaceful resolution of Tibet issue ahead of the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

The groups announced that hundreds of Tibetans would depart from Dharamsala, the home of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Government-in-Exile, on March 10, the day Tibetans would be observing the 49th anniversary of the failed uprising against Chinese rule, with the hope to walk to Lhasa, Tibet's capital.

The long-distance protest march is part of a series of global protest actions Tibetans and their support groups are planning to disrupt the symbolic relay of the Olympic torch as it is carried through 20 cities on five continents.

China is hoping to showcase itself as a global leader and forever silence any challenges to its rule in Tibet, Tsewang Rigzin, president of the Tibetan Youth Congress, told reporters at a press conference in New Delhi.

Mr Tsewang urged Tibetans around the world to take to the street and take actions wherever China takes the torch, but called on Tibetans to refrain from using violent means. The march to Tibet is an initiative by exiled Tibetans to strengthen Tibetan resistance by taking the struggle home, Mr Tsewang said.



Official banner of the movement. Photo by Tenzin Dasel/Phayul

The group members, however, refrained from divulging further details on the march, including the route they planned to take. China has ruled Tibet since Communist troops forcefully invaded the region in 1950. China's illegal occupation of the once peaceful cultural nation subsequently resulted in the death of an estimated 1.2 million Tibetans and destruction of thousands of monasteries.

Besides, China is accused of carrying on unabated gross violation of Human rights in Tibet, other ethnic regions and China at large.

With the world's attention drawn on China as it prepares to host the 2008 Games in China, Tibetans have long vowed not to miss the moment to press for their cause.

And Tibetans are not alone in their struggle. There are other endless lists of international activists and human rights campaigners desperately pushing China for a better change and expose their wrongdoings.

Following is the full text of the press release by the Members of the organizing committee:

Contact:

Sherab Woeser, Campaign Coordinator, 0091- 9868332883 (Delhi)/0091-9418394426 (Dharamsala)
Email: sherabwoeser@yahoo.com

TIBETANS LAUNCH HISTORIC MOVEMENT AHEAD OF BEIJING OLYMPICS

Global Uprising to Include Exiles' March to Tibet Five leading Tibetan organizations announced today the launch of the "Tibetan People's Uprising Movement", a new coordinated Tibetan resistance effort in the lead up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

The Games will take place only months before the 50th anniversary of the 1959 Tibetan National Uprising against China's invasion of Tibet.

The movement's organizers are calling on Tibetans worldwide to join protests during the Beijing Olympics and support a return march of exile Tibetans to their homeland.

"Today, in the spirit of the 1959 Uprising and in memory of the courageous Tibetans who sacrificed their lives for Tibet's independence and continue to resist China's brutal occupation, we are launching a unified movement to bring about an end to Chinese rule in Tibet", said Tsewang Rigzin, President of Tibetan Youth Congress.

The organizing committee said that China's leadership is using the Beijing Olympics as a platform to gain international acceptance and to legitimize its illegal rule in Tibet. After almost five decades of oppression and cultural assimilation, the situation inside Chinese occupied Tibet is dire.

"We are calling on Tibetans worldwide to join us at this critical moment when China is trying to spread its Olympics propaganda", said B. Tsering, President of the Tibetan Women's Association. "Together, we will seize this unprecedented opportunity to voice Tibetan resistance and reinvigorate our freedom struggle."

The march to Tibet is an initiative by exile Tibetans to strengthen Tibetan resistance by taking the struggle home. The march will commence on March 10th, the 49th commemoration of the Tibetan National Uprising in Tibet. Tibetans worldwide will engage in non-violent direct actions and mass protests during China's Olympic torch relay and the Games themselves.

"Our message to China's leadership is loud and clear that after fifty years, Tibetans in exile are determined to return to our homeland and be reunited with our Tibetan brothers and sisters", said Ngawang Woeber, President of the Gu Chu Sum, the ex-political prisoners' association.

Members of the organizing committee: Tibetan Youth Congress, Tibetan Women's Association, Gu Chu Sum Movement of Tibet, National Democratic Party of Tibet, and Students for a Free Tibet, India

THE TIBETAN PEOPLE'S UPRISING MOVEMENT

Background

The Tibetan people stand at an important crossroads as two historic moments approach; the Beijing 2008 Olympics in China and the 50th commemoration of the March 1959 uprising against China's occupation of Tibet. The Chinese government is attempting to use the Olympic Games as a platform to gain acceptance as a global leader and to promote its propaganda on Tibet. Beijing sees this moment as an opportunity to legitimize its rule in Tibet once and for all.

The Olympics will take place just months before Tibetans mark 50 years since His Holiness the Dalai Lama and tens of thousands of Tibetans were forced to escape Tibet and Chinese troops violently crushed the popular uprising in Lhasa and across the country. More than 1 million Tibetans have since died as a direct result of China occupation. At this critical time - as the Chinese leadership wages an unrelenting war on Tibetan religion and culture, and is drastically increasing the rate of Chinese population transfer into Tibet - the very survival of Tibetans as a people is at stake.

It is time for Tibetans to take control of our future through a unified and coordinated resistance movement. We must now proclaim to the Chinese and to the world that the desire for freedom still burns in the heart of every Tibetan, both inside Tibet and in exile. In particular, the time has come for Tibetans in exile to boldly demonstrate that even after 50 years, we long to return to our homeland. A return march from exile in India back home to Tibet is being organized and will revive the spirit of the 1959 Uprising.

The 2008 Olympics will mark the culmination of almost 50 years of Tibetan resistance in exile. We will use this historic moment to reinvigorate the Tibetan freedom movement and bring our exile struggle for freedom back to Tibet. Through tireless work and an unwavering commitment to truth and justice, we will bring about another uprising that will shake China's control in Tibet and mark the beginning of the end of China's occupation.

Declaration

In the spirit of the 1959 Uprising and in memory of all the courageous Tibetans who sacrificed their lives for Tibet's independence and continue to resist China's tyrannical rule, we declare the commencement of the Tibetan People's Uprising Movement.

The Tibetan People's Uprising Movement is a global movement of Tibetans inside and outside of Tibet taking control of our political destiny by engaging in direct action to end China's illegal and brutal occupation of our country.

Through unified and strategic campaigns we will seize the Olympic spotlight and shine it on China's shameful repression inside Tibet, thereby denying China the international acceptance and approval it so fervently desires.

We call on Tibetans inside Tibet to continue to fight Chinese domination and we pledge our unwavering support for your continued courageous resistance.

We call on Tibetans in exile and supporters in the free world to take every opportunity to protest China's Olympic Games and support the Tibetan people's struggle for freedom. We call on Tibetans everywhere to support the return march of Tibetan patriots to our homeland, Tibet.

Demands

As we move forward with our movement we, the Tibetan People, commit ourselves whole-heartedly to this effort and demand that the Chinese government immediately:

1. Remove all obstacles to the unconditional return of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to Tibet and his rightful place as leader of the Tibetan people. The Dalai Lama is revered by Tibetans as our sole and undisputed leader. In recent years, Tibetans inside Tibet have repeatedly called for the Dalai Lama's return for which many have been persecuted and still languish in prison.
2. Begin dismantling the colonial occupation of Tibet. Chinese colonial rule along with the transfer of Chinese into Tibet is marginalizing the Tibetan population and reducing us to a minority in our own country. The very survival of the Tibetan people and nation, represented by our language, religion, culture and traditions, is gravely threatened.
3. Release all Tibetan political prisoners from any form of detention and restore human rights to the Tibetan population.

Thousands of Tibetans – including the young Panchen Lama Gendun Chokyi Nyima, Chadrel Rinpoche, Lobsang Tenzin, Trulku Tenzin Delek, Bangri Rinpoche, Dolma Kyab, Rungye A'drak, and Adruk Lopo – are being persecuted for the peaceful expression of their religious and political beliefs and all Tibetans living inside Tibet are systematically denied their basic human rights.

The Tibetan People also demand that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) immediately:
Cancel the 2008 Olympics in Beijing and never again consider China as a potential host country of
the Olympic Games until Tibet is free.

The Chinese government is committing cultural genocide in Tibet and does not deserve the honour of
hosting such an internationally celebrated event.

4 January 2008,

Tibetan Youth Congress

Tibetan Women's Association

Gu-Chu-Sum Movement of Tibet

National Democratic Party of Tibet

Students for a Free Tibet, India