

Editorial: Pressure China to make peace in Tibet

U.S. and U.N. can do more to bolster the resistance effort.

By EDITORIAL BOARD Star Tribune | NOVEMBER 9, 2012 — 8:22AM

More than 2,000 members of China's Community Party are gathering in Beijing (<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-china-party-congress-20121108,0,267933.story>) over the next several days to begin the once-a-decade leadership transition (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/world/china-leaders/index.html>). Vice President Xi Jinping is predicted to succeed party secretary Hu Jintao, in what the Chinese hope will be a powerful historic moment on the world stage.

But they're being upstaged by an alarming rise of Tibetans setting themselves on fire (<http://www.savetibet.org/resource-center/maps-data-fact-sheets/self-immolation-fact-sheet>) to protest deteriorating conditions in Tibet under China's harsh policies. Some 6,000 Tibetans demonstrated (<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-china-tibetans-20121109,0,7527560.story>) against China this week, which reportedly included self-immolations by five or six teenagers. A U.S. congressional report released last month directly blames the escalation of self-immolations to the China's leaders' increased repression of the Tibetan people and their culture.

The Tibetans' desperate actions (<http://www.startribune.com/world/176516401.html#>) not only have caught the world's attention, but rightly have led to the condemnation of China's policies in Tibet from the United Nations, the European Parliament (<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=MOTION&reference=P7-RC-2011-0540&language=EN>) and U.S. State Department. Last Friday, the U.N. human-rights commissioner (<http://www.voanews.com/content/un-rights-chief-urges-china-to-address-tibetans-grievances/1538402.html>) spoke out forcefully, citing human-rights violations toward Tibetans seeking to exercise "fundamental human rights of freedom of expression, association and religion."

The volatile situation abroad hits home in Minnesota (<http://tafm.org/about.html>), which has the nation's second-largest Tibetan community. Last year, more than 6,000 people turned out at the University of Minnesota to hear the Dalai Lama (<http://www.startribune.com/local/121437289.html>), Tibet's exiled spiritual leader and Nobel Peace Prize laureate. But since then, the number of self-immolations has grown to more than 60, and has spread beyond the activity of young monks.

Shortly after that visit, the Dalai Lama relinquished his political leadership of Tibet to Lobsang Sangay (<http://www.startribune.com/world/127285113.html>), a Tibetan refugee, human-rights lawyer and scholar working at Harvard Law School, whom Tibetans elected in part because of his advocacy of the Dalai Lama's policies toward China. Sangay spoke to a Star Tribune Editorial Board member last month on his first visit to Minnesota since the election.

"Tibetans are committed to democracy and nonviolence -- that's who we are," Sangay said. "Despite the Chinese repression and hard-line policies on our people for decades, we are still nonviolent. The fact that the Tibetans are burning themselves and not burning or harming the Chinese oppressing them bears witness to this."

Chinese forces have occupied Tibet for more than 60 years. The Dalai Lama (http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1989/lama-bio.html) fled in 1959 by crossing the Himalayas into Dharamsala, India, where Tibet's government-in-exile (<http://tibet.net/>) has its headquarters. China's recent influence in that region has made life more difficult for Tibetans, too.

Sadly, President Obama (http://youtu.be/30FrcGN_XkQ) has been more interested in building bridges with China than taking up the cause of Tibet. But the State Department, the U.N. and others continue to pressure the Chinese government to resume talks with Tibetan leaders.

They rightly support the "middle way" approach advocated by the Dalai Lama and Sangay, which calls for Tibet's autonomy rather than independence from China. Unfortunately, the Chinese government has refused to meet since 2010, which caused Tibet's representatives in the talks to resign this year out of frustration.



(<http://stmedia.startribune.com/images/India+China+Tibet.J>
ASHWINI BHATIA, ASSOCIATED PRESS

An Tibetan Buddhist nun exiled in India prays in solidarity with Tibetans who have self-immolated Thursday, Nov. 8, 2012, in

CHINA'S RESPONSE

Reuters: "China won't allow human rights monitors in Tibet" (<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/sns-rt-us-china-congress-tibetbre8a80qp-20121109,0,6714610.story>)

Associated Press: "China slams UN human rights chief for criticizing its policies in Tibet" (<http://www.startribune.com/world/177156161.ht?refer=y>)

Appallingly, the Chinese are calling self-immolators "terrorists" and have exerted even harsher policies, including restricting freedom of movement, forcing a Chinese curriculum in schools and forcing Buddhist monks to denounce the Dalai Lama, spit on his photo and take "patriotic education" classes. Tibetans continue to disappear and be forcefully detained for no reason.

Tibetans deserve support in their dangerous resistance effort. They've shown the world that much more needs to change in China than a transition in Communist Party leadership. The United States and others should continue to shine a spotlight on the situation and pressure China to alter its ways.

RESOURCES ON TIBET

Central Tibetan Administration:

(<http://tibet.net/>) This is the website of Tibet's government-in-exile in Dharamsala, India.

International campaign for Tibet

(<http://www.savetibet.org/>)