

**Testimony of Zeekgyab Rinpoche, Abbot of Tashi Lhunpo Monastery**  
**At the Congressional-Executive Commission on China**  
**September 30, 2020**

Chairman McGovern, Chairman Rubio, respected members of the Commission. Thank you for organizing this very important hearing and the opportunity to speak today.

I am the abbot of Tashi Lhunpo Monastery. My monastery was founded by the First Dalai Lama, and for 500 years, has served as the seat of the Panchen Lama, one of the most important figures in Tibetan Buddhism with spiritual authority second only to the Dalai Lama. The Panchen Lama is of immense significance, to my monastery, to the six million Tibetans in Tibet, and to the millions of Buddhists worldwide including here in the United States.

In 1995, His Holiness the Dalai Lama recognized a six-year-old boy, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima as the 11<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama. Three days later, the Chinese government abducted this boy, making him the world's youngest prisoner at the time. Also abducted along with him were members of his family and the leader of his search party, Jhadrel Rinpoche.

Twenty-five years have passed since the Panchen Lama's abduction. Despite persistent appeals from concerned governments, UN bodies, rights groups, and sympathetic individuals across the world, the Chinese government, to this day, refuses to provide verifiable information about the Panchen Lama's whereabouts, his well-being, or evidence to prove that he is even alive.

Instead, China has propped up another boy as the Panchen Lama, a false reincarnation whom we Tibetan Buddhists do not accept. This has done incalculable damage to our precious 500-year old religious lineage. China's glaring lack of accountability over the kidnapping of such an important religious figure – and a child at that – is an outrageous and unprincipled act. This violates the very basic rights that Tibetan Buddhists should have to choose our own spiritual leaders.

It begs the question: Why did the Chinese government kidnap a six-year old boy – the genuine reincarnate – and prop a false Panchen Lama? A glance at the deep historical and spiritual relationship between the lineages of the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama reveals the answer. In Tibetan history, the unique relationship of the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama is well known. The popular saying is: *As the Sun and the Moon in the sky, so is the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama on earth.* Since the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Panchen Lamas and the Dalai Lamas have played key roles in recognizing and teaching each other's reincarnations. In the past century, the 9<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama helped identify His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, who in turn recognized the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lamas.

Given this traditional practice, the Chinese government will surely use its false Panchen Lama to interfere in the selection of the next Dalai Lama and other high reincarnates. Therefore, all of us – Tibetan Buddhists the world over and supporters of religious freedoms – should be deeply concerned.

It is clear that the Chinese policy over Tibet is deliberate attempt to remove from the face of the earth our racial and cultural identity. This is clearly seen in the way the Chinese government interferes and intervenes in the functioning of the monastic education system by imposing restrictions on our monks and nuns. Even in schools, we see this maligned design to wipe out our unique identity in the form of re-structuring the curriculum and banning the learning of Tibetan language. At the environmental level, there is utter disregard and irreverence for life and ecology of Tibet. In short, there is continuous and systematic destruction of culture, religion, language and environment in Tibet.

Therefore, to safeguard the rights of Tibetan Buddhists worldwide to choose our spiritual leaders without interference by the Chinese government, and to secure the release of the Panchen Lama, I respectfully offer three suggestions to this commission:

- (i) First, on the crucial issue of the selection of the next Dalai Lama, the entire matter should be left to the total discretion and vision of the Dalai Lama without any interference and imposition from CCP. Please do devise a coordinated strategy in unity with allies, and present

a strong and collective stance to challenge CCP's authoritarian regime's malevolent motivations on this matter.

- (ii) Second, please work towards establishing a similar contact group with the many Tibet parliamentary supports groups and caucuses that exist around the world. These contact groups could facilitate the sharing of model resolutions and legislations, such as the **Tibet Policy and Support Act**, among its members.
- (iii) Third, I call upon sympathetic governments, NGOs, and Tibet Support Groups to investigate the whereabouts of the Panchen Lama and those abducted with him so that we have clear and accurate information on their whereabouts including current photos of the Panchen lama, his family members and Jhadrel Rinpoche. We cannot simply keep urging transparency from China, which has shown no intention of being transparent on this, and other human rights issues.

Lastly, I request the US Senate to approve the Tibet Policy and Support Act. If passed, this legislation will bring much needed hope to the Tibetan people as they struggle to survive during this dark period of persecution and illegal occupation by China.

Thank you for the honor of testifying before you. And, thank you for your ongoing support of human rights and religious freedom of the Tibetan people.