CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

DALAI LAMA’S APPEAL TO THE UNITED NATIONS UPON ARRIVING IN INDIA

TRANSLATOR’S INTRODUCTION

The Indian government immediately welcomed the Dalai Lama and those who had arrived with him on April 5, 1959. The twenty-three year old incarnation, now free of Chinese control for the first time in nearly a decade, issued a statement officially rejecting the Seventeen-Point Agreement that had been forced on the Tibetans in 1951 and denouncing the Preparatory Committee for the Autonomous Region of Tibet in which he had been compelled to participate. The statement recounted some of the ways the Tibetans had felt aggrieved during the occupation and narrated the Dalai Lama’s escape from Tibet. While living under the control of China during the intervening years, he had been unable to express himself freely on these points.

As efforts were underway to establish the instruments of a government-in-exile, the Committee for Tibetan Social Welfare was disbanded so that all official efforts to provide for Tibetans in India could be organized under the Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama was initially established at Mussoorie in Uttarakhand, India, near both Tibet and western Nepal. As increasing numbers of Tibetans followed the Dalai Lama into exile, government officials were organized into departments responsible for various aspects of their welfare. Massive relief efforts were implemented to provide for the one hundred thousand Tibetans that would cross the Himalayas in the following few years. As Shakabpa remarks, “a new world had to be built.” Fortunately, the Indian government showed itself to be a sympathetic supporter of the Tibetan exiles.

India’s Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru spoke about Tibet in Parliament. He rebutted charges made by the Chinese that India was holding the Dalai Lama against his will or that India was pursuing a policy of expansionism. He also reported his conversations with Zhou Enlai in which the Chinese Premier assured him that Tibetans

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* See p. 1042 below.
would not be compelled to adopt Communism or unwanted reforms. Nehru’s sympathetic assurances to the Dalai Lama during his 1956 visit to India had encouraged the Dalai Lama to believe that it would be possible to reach an accommodation with China. However, Nehru was at best slow to perceive the dangers posed to Tibet by China and at worst an appeaser, reluctant to condemn China’s aggressive posture for fear of being compelled to take a stand against Mao. Mindful of Indian national interests, he did not offer disinterested advice to the Dalai Lama, but rather urged the young man to follow a path that Nehru himself believed would help India avoid becoming entrapped in a conflict with China over Tibet.

Tsepon Shakabpa was appointed to lead the Bureau of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Delhi, a sort of embassy through which the exile government could act on the international stage. Throughout 1959, the Dalai Lama attempted to gain support in the international community, including appeals directly through the United Nations. Shakabpa and the Dalai Lama’s elder brothers, Gyalo Thondup and Taktser Jikmé Norbu, flew to England and then to New York in order to press Tibet’s case. A resolution was passed on October 27, 1959 calling for “respect for the fundamental human rights of the Tibetan people and for their distinctive cultural and religious life.” The delegation met with the Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld (1905–1961) before returning to India to brief the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government.

The following year, an international conference of nations from Asia and Africa passed a resolution supporting Tibet. The International Commission of Jurists issued several reports condemning human rights abuses and breaches of international law in Tibet by the Chinese. In

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a See pp. 1043–1044 below.


d International Commission of Jurists published two volume (see p. 897 above), which included various official documents, statements by the Dalai Lama, the Cabinet, and other government officials, and statements by Tibetan citizens on all aspects of the invasion and occupation.