

## IPRA 2024 Delegation to Dharamshala: for a Free Tibet and a World of Peace



Immediately following the successful Asia Pacific Peace Research Association conference in Sri Lanka, a delegation of IPRA officers held an historic series of high-level meetings with the Tibetan community-in-exile in Dharamshala, India on the Tibetan-Indian-Chinese border. Including an audience with His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, spiritual head of the Tibetan nation and recipient of the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize, the meetings intensified IPRA's human rights work focus on eradicating all modern colonialisms. Assisted by Tibetan poet and independence activist Tenzin Tsunde of the Occupied People's Forum (OPF), these conversations help frame our thinking about people-to-people peacemaking, 21<sup>st</sup> century diplomacy, and building a truly decolonized world and mindset as we work towards IPRA's 2025 conference hosted by the Indigenous Māori peoples of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

We arrived on March 10<sup>th</sup>, the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Tibetan Uprising following Chinese take-over of traditional Tibetan territory in 1959. The delegation was developed as part of IPRA's ongoing work with the Resistance Studies Initiative at the University of Massachusetts Amherst (coordinated by IPRA's Nonviolence Commission co-convener Stellan Vinthagen), and with the OPF, which brings together civil society leaders from eight still-colonized peoples—Tibet, Palestine, Puerto Rico, Kashmir, Kurdistan/Rojava, Western Sahara, West Papua, and Ambazonia. Led by IPRA co-Secretaries General Matt Meyer and Marite Teresa Munoz, the group was made up of delegates from most of IPRA's regions, including Elavie Ndura, Marcela Agudelo-Ortiz, and Roy Tamashiro. In addition to being honored as special guests at the 65<sup>th</sup> commemoration (along with governmental delegations from Australia and Germany) and taking part in a freedom march which immediately followed, we engaged in several day of dialogues with a diversity of Tibetan figures, becoming dedicated students of the Tibetan movement.

Tibetan head-of-state-in-exile Penna Tsering, formally known as the *Sikyong* of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), described how trying to balance the official support of the US, life on the India side of the border, and the possibilities of integrating under Chinese rule, as “jumping from the frying pan into the fire!” Explaining the negotiations which have been taking place between the Tibetan leadership and that of the Communist Party of China, Tsering

explained that some years ago the Central Tibetan Administration fully and unanimously endorsed the “middle way” plan of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, which would enable the return of the exile communities through a mediated plan of local Tibetan autonomy on the land which has been theirs longer than the existence of the current Chinese governmental structures. The Tibetan Speaker and Deputy Speaker reaffirmed this cross-Tibetan perspective, that a “win-win” solution must be found which is both acceptable to the Tibetan people as well as their Chinese counterparts. The significant role of peace education and study was underscored by Deputy Speaker Dolma Tsering Teykhang, herself a former teacher.

Though a few years ago, His Holiness stepped away from a traditional role of Dalai Lama serving as Tibetan head-of-state, he remains extremely influential politically and well-loved apparently throughout the entire Tibetan community. For some, however, the idea of complete decolonization is still very much the goal. Some representatives of the Tibetan Youth Congress, Student for a Free Tibet, the news media outlet Tibet Watch, and even some younger Members of Parliament expressed their love and respect for the Dalai Lama while also disagreeing with some of the current negotiating positions, favoring full independence. In our talks with Minister Norzin Dolma, Director of the CTA’s Department of Information and International Relations, the importance of continued communications between non-governmental organizations, educational and research associations, and quasi-governmental bodies was underscored, as we committed to staying in touch as IPRA’s work on listening to, honoring, and learning from Indigenous, freedom voices deepen in our work and lives.

The “Middle Way” approach, grounded in the Buddhist principle of avoiding extremes and instead finding middle grounds between differences, might well be more than the leading path for autonomy and freedom for the people of Tibet. We will not put to summary writing our personal time with His Holiness the Dalai Lama, but those moments reverberated with a sense of calm determination, the balance between utmost seriousness and a whimsical understanding that we must engage with one another simply as people. Like our work, for the freedom of all and also the safeguarding of the planet, His Holiness also thinks beyond human concerns, blessing us with the wish: “May the deeds of all the sentient beings be meritorious.” Our work as peace scholars with a human rights focus requires all of us, more and more, to work for the balance in all parts of our lives—our relationships, our organizations, our institutions, our scholarship, our communities, and the world around us as well.









