

DANA ROHRBACHER
48th District, California

WASHINGTON OFFICE:
2300 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-0548
(202) 225-2415

DISTRICT OFFICE:
101 Main Street, Suite 380
Huntington Beach, CA 92648-8118
(714) 960-6483

<http://rohrbacher.house.gov>



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

Committees:
FOREIGN AFFAIRS
Chairman, Subcommittee on
Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats
Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific
SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY
Subcommittee on Space
Subcommittee on Energy

February 3, 2016

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Gayle E. Smith
Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523

Dear Secretary Kerry and Administrator Smith:

On July 8, 2015, the House of Representatives passed House Resolution 337, which called for, among other things, “monitoring of the upcoming electoral process through which the Tibetan people in exile will choose the next democratically elected leader of the Central Tibetan Administration [CTA], the Sikyong” through an election in March 2016.

Further to this resolution, I write to express my concern over troubling rules enacted in relation to that election. These rules appear to have the effect of anti-democratically restricting free speech and free association, at a time when the current CTA incumbents are seeking reelection. These developments are especially concerning given the substantial support and developmental assistance with which the United States Government has provided the Tibetan refugee community over the years.

Specifically, I have read with great concern an open letter sent to incumbent Sikyong Lobsang Sangay and other CTA officials on October 12, 2015. This unprecedented letter, by a group of individuals affiliated with numerous Tibet-related non-governmental organizations (NGOs), describes how the organs of the CTA have issued an election rule that “with one exception, no independent organization or individual is allowed to carry out any announcement or spend funds on campaign activities.”¹ The CTA leadership has exempted from this rule several organizations openly supporting the current incumbents, while refusing similar treatment to organizations supporting non-incumbent candidates. According to one Tibetan political party supporting a non-incumbent, the rules make its campaigning “like wrestling with both hands tied behind [its] back, while groups supporting the incumbents are unbound.”² There are also concerns about selective enforcement of other rules benefitting the incumbents.

The NGO letter explains that by setting up a system “in which certain organizations enjoy full free speech rights and the rest do not, the [CTA] has politicized the process, since Kashag

¹ See <http://tibet.org/openletter/>

² See <http://www.tibetanpoliticalreview.org/articles/tnc-ec-nov20>

[Cabinet] approval is required for exemption from these restrictions, yet the head of the Kashag is seeking re-election. Clearly, no legitimate democratic system can allow one candidate in an election to decide which groups get to speak or spend freely in that election.” As a matter of principle, this is self-evidently true. Yet in a dismissive reply to the NGO letter, the CTA asserted that its rules “cannot be compared to the laws of democratic independent countries.”³

The Consolidated Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2014 contains over \$19 million appropriated for Tibet programs, and the 2016 United States budget appropriated at least \$6 million. The U.S. Agency for International Development carries out additional programs for the Tibetan refugee community as part of its mandate of poverty alleviation and democracy promotion. Given this ongoing support, I believe it essential that the United States Government also continues to monitor how the CTA is operating, including whether its current leadership is complying with accepted democratic standards. I therefore ask you to look into this matter, and inform me of your findings.

Sincerely,



Dana Rohrabacher
Chairman
Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and
Emerging Threats
House Committee on Foreign Affairs

Co-Chairman
Congressional Tibet Caucus

³ See <http://tibet.net/2015/10/clarification-to-the-group-of-tibet-supporters-who-have-expressed-concerns-about-the-tibetan-election-process-in-the-media-dated-13-october-2015/>