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ICJ NEWSLETTER

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The Dalai Lama, spiritual leader of the Tibetan people and Nobel Peace Laureate, visited Australia in May 1992. During the course of the visit, he met the Australian Prime Minister (Mr Paul Keating), other Australian leaders, representatives of the Tibetan community in Australia and human rights groups.

On 11 May 1992 he addressed a crowded luncheon organised at Parliament House, Sydney by the Australian Section of the International Commission of Jurists (AICJ). He was welcomed by Mr John Dowd QC, the Chairman of the AICJ Council.

In the course of his remarks, the Dalai Lama referred to the report of the International Commission of Jurists in 1959 concerning Tibet and the Chinese occupation. He said that this was one of the first efforts of any international organisation to draw the tragedy of the Tibetan people to international attention. He expressed appreciation for the work of the ICJ and especially for its contribution to alerting the world community to the rights of the Tibetan people, particularly their right to self-determination.

The Dalai Lama said that Tibet was passing through a difficult phase of its history so far as the observance of human rights was concerned. He stated that, in effect, the occupation of Tibet by the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC) amounted to a form of cultural genocide. He told the audience of new townships comprised entirely of non-Tibetan Chinese immigrants which had been set up in recent years within the borders of Tibet. He stated that Tibetans who did

not speak the authorised Chinese language, were experiencing extreme difficulty in gaining employment in their own country.

The Dalai Lama told the AICJ luncheon that Tibetan culture was an ancient and peaceful one. He said that it "belonged to the world". He therefore suggested that the world community had a moral and legal responsibility to preserve that culture. Indeed, the Chinese people also had a responsibility to help to preserve Tibetan culture.

The Dalai Lama then referred to the forty years of occupation of Tibet by the forces of the PRC. Although undoubted progress had been made, with new roads, the building of hospitals and schools, for which acknowledgment was due, such actions on the part of the Chinese authorities could not erase the attempted destruction of a culture, the human suffering this was causing and the deprivation of the peoples' right to self-determination, which was guaranteed to the peoples of Tibet by international law. The Dalai Lama pointed out that the Panchen Lama, the other spiritual leader of the Tibetan people, had himself stated these simple truths two days before he died recently.

Concluding his remarks to the Sydney AICJ luncheon, the Dalai Lama said that it had been estimated that one or two members of every Tibetan family have either been injured or had disappeared during the period Chinese occupation. He recounted a number of tragic stories which had been told to him by former prisoners who had escaped to rejoin other Tibetan people in exile in India and elsewhere. Amongst these stories was one of prisoners whose tongues had been hooked by their Chinese guards so that they could not speak. The Dalai Lama concluded that there had been little real improvement in the situation of the people of Tibet. However, he believed that world public concern and sympathy was now growing and that a tide of opinion was changing towards the recognition of the rights of the

peoples of Tibet. He expressed optimism that change in Tibet's status would be achieved within the next five to ten years. He pointed out that, over the past twelve years, he had tried every effort possible to find a peaceful solution between Tibet and China based on mutual respect and understanding. However, whenever he had brought a concrete proposal forward, the Chinese authorities had refused to discuss it.

The Dalai Lama stated that there was a real danger that the ancient culture of Tibet would be destroyed if change were not achieved within the next ten to fifteen years. He pointed to the earlier destruction of ancient distinct cultures in Manchuria, Inner-Mongolia and East Turkestan.

Missing from the AICJ luncheon was the President of the Australian Section, Justice Michael Kirby. He was at the time on his way back to Australia from a meeting of the Executive Committee of the ICJ which took place in Geneva on 9 May 1992. However, before his departure from Sydney, the Dalai Lama made special arrangements to meet Justice Kirby. At the meeting he presented the Judge with a special prayer shawl (carta). He emphasised his appreciation of the work of the ICJ in its 1959 report. However, he suggested that the time had come for another ICJ report on Tibet. If the Chinese authorities denied access to Tibet itself by an ICJ Mission, the Dalai Lama said there were countless Tibetan refugees in exile all over the world, many of whom had recently escaped from the Chinese occupation of Tibet. They could give up to date information to an investigation by an independent mission of lawyers of established reputation and integrity. Justice Kirby said that he would draw the Dalai Lama's suggestion to the notice of the ICJ Executive. At his parting, the Dalai Lama presented Justice Kirby with a copy of his autobiography *Freedom in Exile*.