

Japanese Lawmakers Make First Public Protest against China

Yoshiko Sakurai

As chair of a committee to invite Dr. Lobsang Sangay, prime minister of the Central Tibetan Administration, the Tibetan government in exile, to Japan, I asked him to attend a symposium sponsored by the Japan Institute for National Fundamentals on April 3 under the theme of "Freedom in Asia and the Wave of Democratization. What Is Japan Expected to Do?" I was first moved to find that the symposium venue was almost filled up to capacity despite a stormy weather.

Representatives of Tibetans, Uygurs and Mongolians specifically discussed China's tyrannical crackdown on ethnic minorities, indicating anew that the world is divided into two groups -- a group including Japan based on freedom, democracy and rule of law and the other including China pushing through different values. Some in the audience shed tears to know the realities of the crackdown. The symposium hinted at what Japan should do.

Tibetan realities heard from PM in exile

What Japan should do took shape on the next day. Sixty one suprapartisan lawmakers and 30 others' proxies held a meeting at a parliamentary building to hear Tibetan realities from Prime Minister Sangay. After refraining from touching on the crackdown out of consideration for Beijing over a long time, Japan put forward its own values against China for the first time ever.

Tibet's 14th Dalai Lama has not sought its independence but requested Beijing to guarantee the inheritance of Tibetan Buddhism, language and culture, and a high degree of autonomy. Dr. Sangay, who became prime minister last August, has also called for a high degree of autonomy. It is natural for Tibetan people to wish to live as Tibetans. Nevertheless, the Chinese government has continued a tough crackdown on Tibetans making such requests. The prime minister explained the realities of the crackdown as follows:

“Buddhist monks are punished for failing to defame the Dalai Lama or call the leader a devil. In monasteries where portraits of successive Chinese leaders such as Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao are hung, monks are forced to learn Maoism. Any protest is banned. Those who conduct hunger strikes or participate in peaceful meetings or demonstrations must be prepared to be imprisoned or killed. In peaceful demonstrations on January 24, eight were shot to death. Under such situation,

33 have attempted to burn themselves since 2009, including 22 who have died eventually. Such tragic deaths represent a political protest to inform the world of Tibetan realities.”

A turning point for Japan-China diplomacy

The Chinese government has expressed its strong discontent with Prime Minister Sangay’s visit to Japan and repeated protests to the Japanese government and the opposition Liberal Democratic Party. As a result, no Cabinet minister, senior vice minister or parliamentary secretary attended the meeting. But the 91 lawmakers unanimously adopted their voluntary resolution on the crackdown on Tibetans, urging the Chinese government to immediately terminate its human rights crackdown.

The fact that nearly 100 Japanese politicians publicly protested against China’s human rights crackdown for the first time could represent a key turning point in Japan’s diplomatic history, although media organizations mostly ignored this development. I am proud of the Japan Institute for National Fundamentals that has played a key role in leading to the development.

Yoshiko Sakurai is President, Japan Institute for National Fundamentals.