

**Address by HH Skyabgon Chetsang Rinpoche, on behalf of HH the Dalai Lama,**  
on the occasion of the International Inter-religious Conference *Faith in Human Rights*,  
held in the Peace Palace, The Hague (The Netherlands) on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2008

“This year marks the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a declaration that affirms that all human beings have the right to freedom from want and freedom from fear. These human rights are inclusive, interdependent and universal. Whether we are concerned with suffering born of poverty, with denial of freedom, with armed conflict, or with a reckless attitude to the natural environment everywhere, we should not view these events in isolation. Eventually their repercussions are felt by us all. Therefore, we need effective international action to address these global issues from the perspective of the oneness of humanity, and from a profound understanding of the deeply interconnected nature of today's world.

As free human beings we are able to use our unique intelligence to understand ourselves and our world. But if we are prevented from using our discrimination and creativity, we lose one of the basic characteristics of a human being. Therefore, the political, social and cultural freedoms that are protected when we uphold human rights are of immense value and importance.

If human society loses sight of the value of justice, the value of compassion, the value of honesty, we will surely face greater difficulties in the future. Some people may think that these sort of ethical attitudes may have a place in interpersonal relations, but are unnecessary in such areas as business or politics. I strongly disagree. The quality of all our actions depends on our motivation. A real sense of appreciation of humanity, compassion and love are the key points. If we develop a good heart, then whether the field is science, agriculture or politics, since the motivation is so very important, the result will be more beneficial. With proper motivation these activities can help humanity; without it they have the opposite effect. It is important to recognise that compassion and love are fundamental to relations between sentient beings in general and human beings in particular. Although it is difficult to bring about the inner change that gives rise to these qualities, it is absolutely worthwhile to try.

It is not enough merely to provide people with food, shelter and clothing. Our deeper nature requires that we breathe the precious air of liberty. People do not like to be bullied, cheated or lied to by either an individual or a system. Such acts are contrary to the essential human spirit. It is not only the inherent nature of human beings to yearn for freedom, equality and dignity, they also have an equal right to achieve them.

Our world's rich diversity of cultures and religions should help strengthen rather than obstruct fundamental human rights in all communities. Underlying this diversity are fundamental human principles that bind all of us as members of the same human family. Nevertheless, we can never justify violations of human rights simply because we are eager to maintain old traditions. It may be the custom to discriminate against people of different races, against women, and against weaker sections of society, but as this is inconsistent with universally recognized human rights, these forms of behaviour should change. The universal principles of equality of all human beings must take precedence.

I am convinced that all religions believe in the innate goodness of human beings and that different religions exist to develop and strengthen this quality. The essence of religion is non-violence and peace. Therefore, if society is constructed on the principle of respecting the natural and innate spiritual qualities of human beings, rather than on the specific beliefs

of this or that religion, it will embrace the whole of humanity. It will ensure a practical combination of spiritual and secular values.

The aspiration for democracy and respect for fundamental human rights is as important to the people of Africa and Asia as it is to those in Europe or the Americas. However, despite some development and economic progress, there is no freedom in Tibet. Tibetan culture continues to face fundamental problems of survival. Serious violations of human rights continue throughout Tibet. Yet they are only the symptoms and consequences of a deeper problem. The Chinese authorities have so far been unable to take a tolerant and pluralistic view of Tibet's distinct culture and religion; instead they are suspicious of them and seek to control them.

There is a great and growing desire for change in the world; change that ushers in a renewed commitment to ethical and spiritual values, that resolves conflicts peaceably, employing dialogue and non-violence that upholds human rights and human dignity as well as human responsibility. We need change that educates and promotes the urgent need to care for the planet and its ecological systems, that calls upon all nation states to work towards the universal abolition of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction and that encourages peace, compassion, respect and warm-heartedness. I believe that these goals can be achieved on the basis of increased awareness. Let us widen our perspective to include the well-being of the whole world and its future generations in our vision of prosperity and freedom.

I am delighted to know that the International Inter-religious Conference, Faith in Human Rights will bring together authoritative leaders of the world's religious traditions to share their differing perspectives on upholding and protecting human rights issues. I offer my greetings to everyone attending the conference and my prayers that you will be successful in deciding on practical steps that can be taken to help those who are presently prevented from exercising the rights and freedoms that many of us take for granted."

THE DALAI LAMA

December 4, 2008