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A S S O C I A T I O N

**AAA Human Rights Task Group on China and Tibet
Statement Approved June 20, 2008
American Anthropological Association Committee for Human Rights**

Statement Regarding the Spring 2008 Protests in Tibet

To the Government of the People's Republic of China:

On behalf of the American Anthropological Association (AAA), at present the largest professional organization of anthropologists in the world and composing 11,000 members, the Task Force on China and Tibet of the AAA's Committee for Human Rights would like to express its' deep concern about the ongoing set of factors motivating recent protests by the people of Tibet. This is based upon our discipline's long professional attention to the costs of political and economic development for the collective social and cultural wellbeing of the world's peoples. Given that the Peoples' Republic of China is a signator to the 1966 Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and given that the AAA's own Declaration on Anthropology and Human Rights emphasizes "the equal opportunity of all cultures, societies, and persons to realize this capacity in their cultural identities and social lives," we wish to draw your attention to the following concerns with respect to Tibet.

Point 1: The recent earthquake in Sichuan Province was not simply a Chinese tragedy, but also a Tibetan tragedy; the epicenter was just east of the large Tibetan area of Sichuan. The earthquake is tragic in many ways. Many people lost their lives, including the devastating deaths of many schoolchildren; homes and businesses were destroyed; and many communities were cut off from basic human necessities and life saving operations. In addition, however, the earthquake also perpetuated an information blackout in ethnic Tibetan communities which, just before the earthquake hit, were sites of continued clashes between Tibetans and government forces. In the wake of the earthquake, we no longer have clear information channels to these communities, and thus no longer know the degree of the continuing protests or repression in these areas. In the aftermath of the earthquake and its many tragedies, there is still a need to peacefully resolve the issues behind the current protests in Tibet, and thus these Tibetan protests must not be forgotten.

Point 2: The causes of protests across Tibetan regions of China are multifaceted. They are rooted in the troubled social and political history of China and Tibet, as well as more

contemporary global and regional processes of "development." These causes include, but are not limited to the economic marginalization of Tibetans in the People's Republic of China (PRC), the rising costs of living, and rising levels of unemployment among Tibetans in urban areas. This reality persists despite Chinese government claims of increasing material prosperity in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). In terms of religion, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) interference into religious practice and policy as well as continued, unrelenting public critique of the Dalai Lama has fueled rather than quelled Han-Tibetan ethnic tensions. In addition, limited opportunities for education in Tibetan language and inadequate opportunities for socio-economic advancement for Tibetans within contemporary Tibetan communities—and not just in mixed or Han-dominant communities—continue an historical legacy of "Han Chauvinism" toward Tibetans, one of the People's Republic of China's 55 minority nationalities (*minzu*). Finally, many Tibetans harbor resentment about the Chinese "peaceful liberation" of Tibet in the 1950s, as well as abiding experiences of frustration, despair, anger, and hopelessness, have fueled these historic moments of civil unrest. Many Tibetans involved in the 2008 protests across Tibetan terrain have expressed that they have "nothing left to lose."

Point 3: The recent wave of protests in ethnically Tibetan areas, begun in Lhasa on March 14, are the largest protests that have occurred seen since the Tibetan Uprising of March 1959. However, unlike that historic uprising, these current protests cut across all segments of society (monks and nuns, laypeople, men and women, nomads, peasants, workers) and across *all ethnically Tibetan regions of the PRC*. Counter to official Chinese media representation, this civil unrest was not simply the work of "bad elements" in Lhasa, be they monks or laypeople. Indeed most of the protests have occurred outside the TAR, in Sichuan, Gansu, and Qinghai Province. This (1) reinforces the reality that there is truth to historical claims about the geographic boundaries of "Tibet" in both cultural and political terms, and (2) signals that Tibetan dissatisfaction with the Chinese government is more widespread and serious than has been acknowledged.

Given the above points, we, the AAA Committee for Human Rights, requests the following:

Request 1: We ask that the Chinese government end the use of force against Tibetans in China. In conjunction with this, we ask that the Chinese government end its continuing suppression of Tibetan opinion and release those Tibetans imprisoned for peacefully exercising their international rights to freedom of speech and assembly.

Request 2: We ask that the Chinese government acknowledge the level of discord in Tibet and begin work to ameliorate these conditions. Among other things, this should involve providing resources and opportunities for Tibetans to participate in decision-making processes aimed at addressing the issues underlying these recent protests.

Request 3: We ask that the Chinese government continue serious talks with representatives of the Dalai Lama, and that the government treat him with the courtesy and respect due to a Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and recognized global leader.

Finally, we join with the many Chinese intellectuals who in their petition to the government concluded by expressing their hope that the Chinese and Tibetan people will do away with misunderstandings between them, and we call on the Chinese government to take the lead in fostering such peaceful relations.