

# Tibetan leader calls on China to end 'repressive policies'

Lobsang Sangay, elected leader of Tibetan 'government in exile', urges China to return to talks on autonomy



Tibetan leader, Lobsang Sangay (right), and the Dalai Lama have reaffirmed their commitment to the 'Middle Way' towards autonomy. Photograph: Ashwini Bhatia/AP

The elected leader of the Tibetan "government in exile", based in [India](#), has called on [China](#) to end "repressive policies" he blames for pushing 130 Tibetans to burn themselves alive in protests.

Lobsang Sangay, the Sikyong or elected political head of the Tibetan government in exile, called on Chinese authorities to engage in talks on autonomy as the Dalai Lama and other leaders launched a renewed push for the "Middle Way", a 40-year-old strategy that aims for genuine autonomy for Tibetans within the Chinese constitution.

Beijing has ruled [Tibet](#) since 1951, a year after invading, and considers the Himalayan region an integral part of Chinese territory.

Sangay said: "Our aim is to counter the efforts of Chinese officials and representatives who are misleading many around the world about what the 'Middle Way' is." The government in exile, known as the Central Tibetan Administration, is based in the northern Indian hill station of Dharamsala.

The Dalai Lama, who shed his political responsibilities in 2011 but who remains a revered spiritual leader, urged China to embrace democracy as he marked the 25th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square crackdown.

The Nobel Laureate offered prayers for the hundreds of people – thousands, by some estimates – who died in Beijing on 3-4 June 1989 when Communist authorities sent in troops to crush their peaceful pro-democracy demonstration.

"I offer prayers for those who died for freedom, democracy and human rights," the Dalai Lama [said in a statement posted on his website](#).

He said Beijing should embrace mainstream democracy which "will help China to gain the trust and respect of the rest of the world".

The new effort comes after [a series of self-immolations in recent years](#), which campaigners say are a sign of increasing desperation among Tibetans. "Obviously self-immolation is of great concern to

us," Sangay said. "This is a desperate act. Tibetans are giving their lives for the cause and life is precious."

Many of those who have killed themselves come from the eastern parts of the historical area of Tibet, outside the current Tibetan Autonomous Region.

Beijing has responded by deploying more security forces, and increasing surveillance and restrictions. It accuses the Dalai Lama of fomenting the protests but the Tibetan leadership in exile deny the charge.

"We have urged them not to do this [self-immolate] but the Chinese reaction has been more repression and we are worried that this will lead to more protests in a vicious cycle," Sangay said.

The Dalai Lama has called the self-immolations an ineffectual form of [protest](#), but has said they are understandable and refuses to condemn them.

Barack Obama, who met the Dalai Lama this year, and other western leaders have called on Beijing to resume talks with the Tibetan Central Administration that broke down in 2010. But there appears to be little chance of any new negotiations on autonomy and Beijing dismissed the push for the "Middle Way", which would include handing Tibetans decision-making positions in the region.

"We advise these people to give up their attempts to separate Tibet from China," the foreign ministry spokesman Hong Lei told a regular press briefing on Wednesday.

Robbie Barnett, a professor of modern Tibetan studies at Columbia University, said the "Middle Way" has made no major progress since the Dalai Lama retired from his political position, despite its backing from the US and other western governments. "Talks are always possible, but any positive outcome would require exceptional skill and patience on the Tibetan side, and a shift in policy direction by the Chinese side," he said.

Sangay said that "50 years of disappointing legacy" meant "expectation is a little bit less", but hope remained.

Some observers have noted growing gaps between the Tibetan leadership in exile and generations born in exile.

"A widening generational divide finds Tibetan leaders unable to resolve growing dissatisfaction among younger Tibetan," [a US diplomatic cable from 2008 noted](#). "With few professional opportunities and growing impatience with the Dalai Lama's 'Middle Way', young Tibetans expressed frustration with their future prospects," it said.

Barnett said Tibetan leaders had failed to appease critics within the exile community who call for Tibetans to push for total independence and argue that Beijing will never agree to any concessions on autonomy or the return of exiles.