



OPEN LETTER

to the

U.N. Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen

on

Tibet Role in Climate Change Solutions

Dear Conference participants:

We write to urge that the U.N. Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen give serious attention to the 'Third Pole', as Tibet is known for being the largest repository of glacially stored water outside of the Arctic and Antarctic. We believe that multinational policies to mitigate the causes of and adapt to the effects of climate change must consider the challenges of climate change in Tibet, and include the direct participation of Tibetan stakeholders, particularly nomads. This is now a global issue and of huge importance.

On November 18-19, parliamentarians from 30 countries met in Rome for the 5th World Parliamentary Convention on Tibet. Climate change was a major topic of the discussion. As a result, the Convention adopted a Declaration [1] that made the following findings:

"Environmental degradation on the Tibetan plateau, the so-called Third Pole, as a result of climate change caused by greenhouse gas emissions, the mismanagement of natural resources by Chinese governmental and commercial interests, and the

settlement of Tibetan nomads into fixed communities, which separates them from their traditional livelihood and stewardship of Tibetan grasslands; and

Chinese policies to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change on the Tibetan plateau affect billions of people in Asia, and that the involvement and experience of Tibetans is integral to the successful implementation of climate change policies.”

Further, in the Declaration parliamentarians called on:

“Governments to explore multinational mechanisms to work collaboratively on the challenges of climate change in Tibet, including with the direct participation of Tibetan stakeholders. To this end, participants of this convention will draft and publish an open letter expressing the key importance of Tibet as the Third Pole prior to the U.N. Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen.”

According to Chinese meteorologists, temperatures on the Tibetan plateau are rising twice as fast as the rest of the earth, and Tibet is an increasingly important barometer of global climate change.. Glaciers are melting, exposing dark rock and soil, and increasing the absorption of solar radiation. Due to resultant variations in the monsoon cycle, many areas on the Tibetan plateau are drying out and desertifying.

According to scientists, the Chinese government’s land-use policies are contributing to the acceleration of global warming and environmental destruction, including degradation of the grasslands, on the fragile high-altitude plateau. These land-use policies include the construction of infrastructure, an emphasis on urbanization despite a predominantly rural population, and the settlement of nomads, which is threatening one of the last examples of sustainable pastoralism on earth. Tibetans are being deprived of the stewardship of their land at a time of environmental crisis.

Because Tibet is the source of several of the world’s largest rivers and plays a prominent role in the Asian monsoon system, the consequences will affect the lives of millions of people downstream as well as those on the high plateau. In the long term, the disappearance of glaciers will create severe water shortages. Millions of people in Asia have a stake in the fate of Tibet’s glaciers and grasslands.

Tibet is central to a global climate change solution, and the Tibetan people must play a critical role in the implementation of solutions. In addition to providing river water and monsoon rains to much of Asia, Tibet’s grasslands, if properly repaired, can serve as a carbon sink. Therefore, we urge negotiators at the conference to consider initiatives and policies that take into account the following:

1. Independent, international scientific assessments of the changes in the Tibetan plateau's ecosystems, water resources and land use policies. The participation of scientists and relevant stakeholders from Tibet and from those nations that depend on Tibet’s water is necessary for rigorous examination, analysis and interpretation of conditions on the plateau. This will facilitate an equitable and durable approach to adapting to and mitigating the affects of climate change in the region, including science-based ecosystem restoration and management of the plateau’s grasslands and forests.

2. Integrated participation of Tibetans, especially Tibetan nomads, in the decision-making and management of the plateau’s natural resources. Tibet’s

nomads have been stewards of its rangelands for thousands of years. Their experience is essential not only for understanding changes in the ecosystem, but for addressing the threat of degradation of the grasslands. Unfortunately, government policies are ignoring this essential human resource and settling and displacing nomads from the grasslands in a misguided attempt to reduce desertification. This goes against the latest scientific research that states that livestock mobility is critical to the health of the grasslands and that grazing can mitigate the negative warming effects on the rangelands. There is increasing consensus among Chinese, Tibetan and Western scholars that the traditional ecosystem knowledge of nomadic pastoralists is an essential component of any solution.

3. Encourage trans-boundary collaborative decision-making and governance of the Tibetan plateau's water resources, including all regional and local stakeholders. Such multi-national cooperation will enhance the effectiveness of mitigation policies and promote equitable adaptation strategies that can reduce the risk of conflict over competition for water resources.

Just as China is essential to successful implementation of global climate change solutions, Tibet is indispensable to China's ability to implement them successfully. We urge negotiators to ensure that strategies to address climate change include stakeholders in Tibet, particularly nomads. This inclusion is essential to understanding, mitigating and adapting to changes in the Tibetan plateau's water, forest, and grassland resources and ecosystems, critical to millions of people downstream and for the stability and security of Asia.

On behalf of the International Parliamentary Network on Tibet:

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