

March Home to Tibet: Australian Style

Bruce Carstairs (Thursday, 12 March 2009)

Tibet Action Group of Western Australia (TAGWA)

A group of intrepid walkers - six in total – under their fearless leader Zatul Rinpoche, undertook a 200 kilometer walk from Bunbury's Bicentennial Square to the Chinese Consulate in Perth, capital of sunny Western Australia, over eleven days.

Why six walkers, you ask, and in late summer high temperatures? Perth is one of the most isolated capital cities of the world, harbouring a fiercely independent, even defiant population of 1.5 million individuals. We symbiotically relate well to the Tibetan national spirit.

Our band of walking bards sported white t-shirts, a map of the *real* Tibet at its heart-centre, "TAGWA" logo to the right, and a "TIBET IS FREE" boldly etched below. We walked 20 plus kilometers per day, proudly carrying yellow banners reading "Peace March for a Free Tibet" and Tibetan National Flags. Traffic passing by beeped and waved us on with encouragement. Occasionally there would be a misguided, "Go get a job!"

So, why walk in summer's heat with so many other vanities to pursue? So much planning: organizing a support vehicle; writing to mayors of the five councils whose electorates we would be passing through; hand-signed letters to every member of our state parliament including the Premier and Opposition Leader; pre-mapping the journey and accommodation; food purchases; t-shirt design and ordering, banner writing ... and the list goes on.

It is because the light of Tibet will never go out - not in the hearts of Tibetans, or here in the microcosm of the International Community that is Perth. Like the Tibetan people, we are small in number. Like the Tibetan people, we do not accept unjust authority. Like the Tibetan landscape, Western Australia is vast and mostly barren.

'David' can and will prevail over 'Goliath'. Just as the Chinese Emperor can only rule by virtue in order to retain the 'mandate of heaven', so too the current 'Emperors' in Beijing cannot ultimately prevail in their occupation of Tibet.

We of the Tibet Action Group of Western Australia had to physically sign with our bodies, in the sweat of hard kilometers, our tears and cries for our brothers and sisters in Tibet. This past year in particular so many Tibetans have sacrificed their lives in peaceful demonstrations. Bludgeoned and brutalised, their spirit will not be broken. We of the free world, we who have sweetmeats and fun-parks for lives, must never forget that our freedoms and privileges rely upon our willingness to stand up for these freedoms in the far-flung corners of the earth.

His Holiness The Dalai Lama has been a beacon of light not only for the Tibetan people, but for the whole world. His is a life of unwavering dedication, and impeccable virtue and integrity. Quintessential sign of Tibetan culture and the Buddha-dharma, his actions conjoined with the Tibetan people's and our own public demonstrations – no matter how small - will bear positive fruit.

After many speeches facing the Chinese Consul General Li Shugang's offices, appealing to the higher order of Chinese culture; acknowledging the sincere efforts of sympathetic Chinese intellectuals, and especially the bold and significant petition of 'Charter 08'; deploring the bloody and hard-headed crackdown of the past year; drawing attention to the shameful shoot-to-kill policy, and the infamous "Strike Hard Campaign" designed to place all Tibetans owing allegiance to the Dalai Lama in shackles.

At demonstration's end, we released 50 pure white helium balloons with coloured ribbons of "Free Tibet", one balloon for each of the 50 sad years of brutal colonial rule and enslavement. They carried their healing powers right over the embassy building. We then embraced our band of now 40-odd warriors of peace in an emotional group hug. We felt we had really achieved something for our kinfolk locked inside the Land of Snows.

President Hu Jintao: we of Western Australia say you can and will not keep Tibet by abrogating your duty to be a virtuous ruler. The Son of Heaven never uses an electric cattle-prod to violate nuns' and monks' bodily passages.

People of Tibet: we resolutely stand beside you in your hour of need. Stand firm in virtue, gentlefolk of the Buddha's Central Land, for your hour of triumph is close at hand.

Our next March is home to a free Tibet.