

**Statement by Nobel Peace Laureates
Shirin Ebadi, Mairead Corrigan Maguire and Jody Williams
on the occasion of
50 Years in Exile: A Celebration of Tibetan Culture- Thank You Tibet! Campaign Launch
Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh, India – October 28, 2009**

His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the people of Tibet affirm critical values that the world is in danger of losing. They are a model for all of us: despite the attack on their people and the displacement of their culture they preach and practice compassion and respect for the dignity of every person. Furthermore, by making a peaceful transition from ancient traditions of leadership by a small group of hereditary rulers to government by democratically elected leaders, Tibetans have set an admirable example. If a community exiled from their homeland and scattered across the world can come together and grow into a democratic society that respects human rights, every community can do so. The Tibetans also demonstrate how common core human values can and should transcend geography, ethnicity and culture.

The Tibetans made an extraordinary choice to engage in peaceful nonviolent protest to the destruction of their culture and the take over of their homeland. By doing so, they followed in the the great Indian example of Mahatma Gandhi and served as examples for the peace and democracy movements in Northern Ireland and Iran. Nonviolence can work, it must work and it does work – it has brought about peaceful change from India to the Czech Republic to South Africa. Every time women and men who are treated unjustly choose to respond with peaceful protest rather than violence they invite those whom they protest to respond with respect and compassion. There are thousands of women and men in India, China, Burma, Singapore, Malaysia and all the countries of this region who are inviting their leaders to listen to their protests and respond with respect and compassion. It is a grave mistake for leaders to ignore them, or to mistake their nonviolent protest for weakness or surrender. Nonviolence is powerful - it has overthrown governments and irrevocably changed societies.

Today, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan community in exile ask for the freedom to practice and preserve their culture. Governments of the region and of the world should press the government of China to have constructive dialogue with representatives of the Tibetan people. His Holiness proposes the most basic and essential of steps that do nothing more than demonstrate respect and compassion for Tibetans: Tibet should be a zone of peace, free of nuclear weapons, where fundamental human rights and democratic freedoms are honored and the natural environment is restored and protected. There is no reason that the governments of China and leaders all over the world who support the Tibetans should not work together to listen and respond to the voice of the Tibetan people by engaging in sincere negotiations on the future status of Tibet and of relations between the Tibetan and Chinese people.

Close by, the people of Burma are asking their government to hear their voice as well. While the government has imposed an undemocratic so called “roadmap to democracy” and set elections for next year, governments of the region should support civil society’s calls for steps that will indicate a commitment to true democracy. Burma’s regional neighbors should ask the government of Burma to release Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners and engage in a process of inclusive constitutional review with all stakeholders before holding elections.

Also in the region, just last week ASEAN inaugurated their Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. It is right and worthy of a regional organization aspiring to bring peace and prosperity to form such a body. However, the treatment by governments of civil society at the same summit was deplorable. A government must not refuse to meet with civil society or prevent civil society organizations from choosing their own representatives. It completely undermines the principle of civil society’s critical voice in governance.

Asian nations have long focused on economic growth and development. It is past time for these nations to show leadership by responding to their own citizens’ calls for human rights and democracy. It is also critical to support the calls of the citizens of other nations. From person to person, from citizen to government and from nation to nation, there must always be a positive response to nonviolence: engaging with peaceful citizens is the only way to preserve peace and ensure human security.

For more information, please visit the Nobel Women’s Initiative at nobelwomensinitiative.org. The Nobel Women’s Initiative was established in 2006 by sister Nobel Peace Laureates Jody Williams, Shirin Ebadi, Wangari Maathai, Rigoberta Menchu Tum, Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan Maguire to strengthen and expand the global movement to advance nonviolence, peace, justice and equality. Contact: Rachel Vincent, Media and Communications Manager, rvincent@nobelwomensinitiative.org

Please visit <http://thankyoutibet.org> for information on the
Thank You Tibet! Campaign.