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Verein Tibeter Jugend in Europa
Tibetan Youth Association in Europe

17th April 2023

Statement of TYAE on the video of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama

His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama is a symbol of hope for Tibetans in exile and in illegally occupied Tibet. Accordingly, the past week has been shocking and painful for TYAE, Tibetans and Dalai Lama supporters around the world. We at TYAE have been following the incident closely and have processed all the new information that emerge almost daily as best as possible.

Especially as a youth association with a close relationship to young people and children, we unequivocally condemn all forms of abuse towards children and all people. We can very well understand the sensitivity towards the protection of children due to cases of abuse by religious institutions and individuals. However, TYAE clarifies that the interaction between His Holiness and the child at a public audience in February 2023 was in no way sexual.

As Tibetans, we know the cultural context in which this interaction took place. It is clear to us that the Dalai Lama was expressing his affection, warmth and humor in this interaction, contrary to misinterpretation by the media and criticism by the public.

It is important to look at the whole video and the whole context. The interaction took place on February 28, 2023, during a public event with over a hundred participants in front of dozens of cameras. The child's mother was seated on the podium next to the Dalai Lama and neither she, nor the child itself, nor any other participant perceived the interaction as inappropriate. Immediately after the event, the mother and child expressed their gratitude towards the Dalai Lama in interviews with the Tibetan media. Reportedly, the parents of the child sent an unsolicited letter to the Bureau of His Holiness apologizing for the commotion.

More than a month after this event on April 9th, 2023, a misleading excerpt of the video was brought in circulation and there is evidence that the escalation of the sharing was driven by Chinese associated pages. The full video, as well as interviews with the child and his mother, provide important context to this interaction, which has been sensationalized by many media outlets.

Decades of government censorship of the Dalai Lama throughout the Chinese-controlled web were suddenly lifted this week. The search term "Dalai Lama" trended on Weibo, Wechat and Douyin, the most popular Chinese social media and news services. Users from China and illegally occupied Tibet found information about His Holiness for the first time, which included deep fake images without any context and ridiculing posts about the Dalai Lama.

The high level involvement of the Chinese government in defaming the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan freedom movement is regrettable but not surprising. The Chinese government's decades-long smear campaign against the Dalai Lama is well known to Tibetans and supporters of the Dalai Lama. We were all the more disappointed by the media, which sensationalized this interaction with hasty reporting and sometimes took statements out of context without providing necessary background information.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama is the spiritual leader of the Tibetan people and has dedicated his life to spreading peace and compassion for all living beings. To see his life's work attacked based on a misleading edit is deeply disturbing.

In these difficult times, we stand with him and fight so that truth prevails.