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Statement of the Deutsche Buddhistische Ordensgemeinschaft (DBO, German Buddhist Monastic Association) on the Protests against the Da- lai Lama by the International Shugden Community (ISC)

The Deutsche Buddhistische Ordensgemeinschaft (DBO) formally dissociates itself from the protests against the Dalai Lama, which are being staged worldwide, and also in Frankfurt (Main). The DBO remains of the conviction that opinions among Buddhists should be expressed in a peaceful, respectful, truthful and reasonable manner. The DBO is very concerned about the protesters' aggressive, misleading and unethical behaviour and the false image being presented by them to the public. The DBO emphasizes that the protesters belonging to the New Kadampa Tradition (NKT) are no Buddhist monks and nuns according to the monastic rules of the Buddha and that their behaviour in public represents neither the Buddha nor his teachings (Dharma) nor the Buddhist community (Sangha).

We regret that a Buddhist group is trying to cause further damage in the West to the Dalai Lama and Tibetan Buddhism at a time when the Tibetan Buddhist teachings are under great pressure in their country of origin, Tibet.

The background: As early as 1996 to 1998 and especially since 2008, an international media and rally campaign, conducted professionally and aggressively, is being waged by mostly western followers of the so-called protector Dorje Shugden against the Dalai Lama.

The reason is as follows: Since 1978, the religious leader of the Tibetan people has been publicly emphasizing that the invocation of Shugden has degenerated to a cult practice with strongly sectarian characteristics, a practice of which he could not approve. In fact, religious scientists and Tibetologists confirm that the organized form of the invocation of Shugden is tied to the conviction that the Gelug school is superior to the other schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

The Dalai Lama further criticizes that this practice has veered farther and farther away from the Buddhist teachings.

Dorje Shugden (also called Dholgyal) is a so-called protector who has been controversial since his origination in the 17th century. In the Tibetan cultural area, protectors are entities which are invoked and asked for help, e.g. for the protection of the Buddhist teachings, but also in worldly matters such as the harvest, the building of houses, et cetera. There are different and contradictory views of the nature and the functions of Shugden.

The protesters, usually appearing in public as Buddhist monks and nuns, accuse the Dalai Lama of the suppression of religious freedom, even calling him the “the worst dictator in the modern world”. However, Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and centers as well as the practitioners themselves are free to decide whether or not they will follow the Dalai Lama’s advice. And a majority among them have spoken out against a controversial practice such as that of the organized followers of Shugden that causes disharmony and depreciates other religious communities.

The internationally well-linked protesters are for the most part members of the New Kadampa Tradition (NKT), a charitable organisation that was founded in England by the Tibetan scholar Geshe Kelsang Gyatso. It is one of the fastest growing organisations in the UK. On the outside, it presents itself as modern, contemporary and democratic, internally however – according to testimony by former followers – the organisation is marked by rigid, sectarian structures, with Kelsang Gyatso as its intangible and sole ruler.

To organize its worldwide protests, NKT keeps founding new “front organizations”, which serve to veil the protesters’ background. The ISC is already the third of its kind. The Shugden websites, which it operates, do not cite any official contact information or legal registration, are run anonymously (domains by proxy), and do not name anyone legally responsible for the accusations.

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Supplement to the statement of the German Buddhist monastic community (DBO) on the protests against His Holiness the Dalai Lama by the International Shugden Community (ISC)

The DBO has already pointed out that in its opinion that the allegations are factually distorting and misleading.

Here are some examples:

- ▶ **Assertion:** “There are 4 million Shugden devotees.” – **Correction:** Since 1996 academics repeatedly state that this number is “very much exaggerated.”
- ▶ **Assertion:** “Shugden devotees are excluded from medical assistance, education and the issuance of passports because of the Dalai Lama’s politics” – **Correction:** Individual cases like this may have occurred due to overzealous Tibetan individuals; however there is no policy on the part of the Tibetan Central Administration or the Dalai Lama to exclude Shugden devotees from medical care, education or the issue of documents. Neither Amnesty International (1998) nor the Supreme Court in Delhi (2010) was able to ascertain a violation of human rights or religious rights. (<http://tinyurl.com/n3uvj4e> and <http://tinyurl.com/lu82yk>)
- ▶ **Assertion:** “The Dalai Lama has banned Shugden.” – **Correction:** There is no general prohibition of Shugden, but there are restrictions. For example, monasteries have made decisions, on the basis of democratic majority votes, against the invocation of Shugden, and the Dalai Lama has asked those who regard him as their teacher to abandon Shugden practice. He has repeatedly emphasized that everyone is free to ignore his advice and can practice Shugden privately.
- ▶ **Assertion:** “The Dalai Lama suppresses religious freedom.” – **Correction:** Shugden may very well be invoked privately or in Shugden temples and monasteries by his devotees, and this happens. It is the Shugden practice itself that restricts religious freedom by threatening those who exercise the spiritual practices of other Tibetan-Buddhist schools with severe penalties. Restrictions of this practice would therefore increase the freedom of all others to practice what they wish to practice. In any society it is necessary for the protection of freedom of the majority to restrict religious extremism and to exclude their advocates from public institutions.
- ▶ **Assertion:** “The Dalai Lama is lying.” – **Correction:** To have a different perspective on Shugden than its devotees is not a lie, but the exercise of the right to have one’s own opinion.

- ▶ **Assertion:** “The Shugden issue is the fault of the Dalai Lama alone.” – **Correction:** The Shugden issue has existed since the 17th century. Radical Shugden devotees have alienated monasteries and Tibetan Buddhists against them. Two radical followers are sought by Interpol for the triple murder of a Shugden opponent and his two students. It is absurd to make the Dalai Lama responsible for these developments.

- ▶ **Assertion:** “The invocation of Shugden is just a simple prayer for the development of compassion and wisdom.” – **Correction:** This allegation ignores the widespread sectarian and violent background of Shugden worship which can be proven by reading the scriptures.

For further information the DBO recommends those interested to consult academic experts and independent academic sources to better understand the background of these controversies and the motives of the protesters.

These are representative examples of available online resources that can be consulted:

- ▶ **Canonicity and Divine Interference: The Tulkus and the Shugden-Controversy** by Michael von Brück, Centre for Religious Studies Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich: <http://is.gd/mB9MxQ>
- ▶ **Academic Research regarding Shugden Controversy & New Kadampa Tradition:** <http://is.gd/y1gCEO>

