

# March 10 Commemoration

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Today marks the 67th anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising Day. For ten days, beginning on this very day 67 years ago, more than 100,000 Tibetans surrounded the Norbulinka palace in Lhasa.

Filled with determination, outrage, devotion, and love, they stood shoulder-to-shoulder in an unimaginably courageous attempt to stop the Chinese occupiers from ripping their Yeshe Norbu (Precious Jewel) from his homeland and his people.

Ten years earlier, in 1950, the Chinese invasion of Tibet had installed the People's Liberation Army of China as a permanent occupying military force in Lhasa. The Tibetan army had been defeated, but the resistance grew stronger.

By 1957, resistance fighters, particularly in Kham, were gaining ground. Emboldened, the resistance became stronger in Lhasa and other parts of Tibet as well.

The occupiers hit back brutally against the resistance fighters and the networks of monasteries aiding them. The Chinese government in Beijing increasingly viewed the Dalai Lama as a dangerous beacon of hope and strength to the Tibetan people and their attempts to overthrow the occupation.

On March 1, 1959, while the Dalai Lama was preoccupied with taking his final Master of Metaphysics examination, two junior Chinese army officers visited him at the sacred Jokhang cathedral.

They pressed him to confirm a date on which he could attend a theatrical performance and tea at the Chinese Army Headquarters in Lhasa.

This was an extraordinary occurrence. First, the invitation had not been conveyed through the Kashag (the Cabinet) as it should have been. Second, the party was not to be held at the palace, but at the Chinese military headquarters.

Ominously, the Dalai Lama had been "asked" to attend alone.

Understanding very well that his life was in danger, His Holiness delayed by saying that he would fix a date when the examination ceremonies had been completed.

A week later, the interpreter for General Tan Kuan-sen, one of the three Chinese military leaders in Lhasa, telephoned the Chief Official Abbot demanding the date on which the Dalai Lama would attend their army camp events. March 10 was confirmed.

On March 9th, Brigadier Fu summoned the Commander of the Dalai Lama's bodyguard and informed him that on the following day there was to be no customary ceremony as the Dalai

Lama moved from the Norbu Linka summer palace to the army headquarters, two miles beyond.

No armed bodyguard was to escort him, and no Tibetan soldiers would be allowed beyond the Stone Bridge – a landmark on the perimeter of the sprawling Chinese army encampment. Fu also ordered that the event be kept secret.

Nevertheless word quickly spread through Lhasa.

By **March 10, 1959**, thousands Tibetans rose up spontaneously to surround Norbulinka palace. Over the coming days, the gathering grew to more than 100,000 souls.

Fearing the Dalai Lama would be abducted to Beijing and never permitted to return to Tibet, they formed a living wall of protection around their beloved leader.

At approximately 4:00 pm. on March 17, the Chinese fired two mortar shells at the Norbu Linka. The munitions landed short of the palace walls in a marsh.

This attack triggered the Dalai Lama to make the agonizing decision to leave Lhasa.

In his autobiography he writes, “There was no certainty that escape was physically possible at all – Ngabo had assured us it was not. If I did escape from Lhasa, where was I to go, and how could I reach asylum?”

At 10 pm. on the night of March 17, wearing a foot soldier’s uniform with a gun slung over his shoulder, the Dalai Lama marched out of the Norbu Linka and onto the danger-filled road to India and freedom.

By March 19, fighting had broken out in Lhasa. Hand-to-hand combat raged for two days with the odds stacked hopelessly against the poorly equipped and inexperienced Tibetan resistance.

The Norbulinka was bombarded by 800 shells on March 20. Thousands of men, women and children camped around the palace wall were slaughtered.

All remaining members of the Dalai Lama's bodyguard corps were lined up and publicly executed, as were any Tibetans discovered with weapons.

In all, some 87,000 Tibetans were killed.

Veteran Daily Mail war correspondent, Noel Barber, dubbed Lhasa’s March 20, 1959 “Bloody Friday”.

I’m sure each of us would find it impossible to express the mix of emotions we feel when we contemplate all that transpired on March 10th, 1959 and in the weeks and years that have followed.

But today, as we commemorate the 67th anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising Day, we are forever standing with those brothers and sisters who so courageously rose up in 1959.

We are standing together because we continue our protests and acts of civil disobedience. Resistance inside and outside Tibet is as strong as ever.

We are still standing together because China has failed to break the identity, unity, and spirit of the Tibetan people.

We are standing together because we share with all Tibetans and our allies around the world that fierce inheritance of determination, outrage, devotion, and love.

Today we stand with the brave men and women of Tibet who have sacrificed their lives, and who continue to suffer, for the cause of Tibet.

We will keep standing together. We will not be defeated. Thank you and Free Tibet!