

Dalai Lama says he has given up on China talks

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DHARMSALA, India — The Dalai Lama said Saturday he has given up on efforts to convince Beijing to allow greater autonomy for Tibet under Chinese rule.

The Tibetan spiritual leader said he would now ask the Tibetan people to decide how to take the dialogue forward.

China has repeatedly accused the Dalai Lama of leading a campaign to split Tibet from the rest of the country. The Dalai Lama has denied the allegations, saying he is only seeking greater autonomy for the Himalayan region to protect its unique Buddhist culture — a policy he calls the "middle way."

"I have been sincerely pursuing the middle way approach in dealing with China for a long time now but there hasn't been any positive response from the Chinese side," he said in Tibetan at a public function Saturday in Dharamsala, the north Indian town that is home to Tibet's government-in-exile.

"As far as I'm concerned I have given up," he said in an unusually blunt statement.

"The issue of Tibet is not the issue of the Dalai Lama alone. It is the issue of 6 million Tibetans. I have asked the Tibetan government-in-exile, as a true democracy in exile, to decide in consultation with the Tibetan people the future course of action," the Dalai Lama said.

His speech was translated by his spokesman, Tenzin Takhla.

The spiritual leader's comments come ahead of a new round of talks between his envoys and Chinese government officials at the end of October. Those talks are still on track, according to Chhime R. Chhoekyapa, another spokesman for the Dalai Lama.

Most Tibetans have supported the Dalai Lama's push for autonomy for the region. The Tibetan Youth Congress is the only major activist group that is advocating full independence for Tibet.

Beijing insists Tibet has belonged to China for centuries. Many Tibetans, however, say the region was effectively an independent nation until Chinese Communist troops invaded in 1950.

Phone calls to China's United Front Work Department, the Communist Party agency that handles contacts with the Dalai Lama, rang unanswered Saturday.

The Dalai Lama has been living in Dharamsala since fleeing Tibet after an unsuccessful uprising against Chinese rule in 1959.