

“Much of the world is waiting to see how China’s concepts of ‘harmonious society’ and ‘peaceful rise’ will unfold.”

—HH the Dalai Lama
to the US Congress



ICT Europe
Vijzelstraat 77
1017HG Amsterdam
The Netherlands
Phone: +31 (0)20 3308265
Fax: +31 (0)20 3308266
eupolicy@savetibet.org

ICT Brussels
11, rue de la linière
1060 Brussels
Belgium
Phone: +32 (0)2 609 44 10
Fax: +32 (0)2 609 44 32
ict-eu@savetibet.org



Sonam Zeksang/ICT

US awards Dalai Lama highest civilian honour

US President Bush and Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi bestowed the Congressional Gold Medal, the country’s highest civilian honour, on His Holiness the Dalai Lama on 17 October at a ceremony in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda. The event marked the first time that a sitting US President appeared with the Dalai Lama in a public event.

Asked if his attendance at the ceremony would anger China, President Bush responded “I have consistently told the Chinese that religious freedom is in their nation’s interest. I’ve also told them that I think it’s in their interest to meet with the Dalai Lama and will say so at the ceremony today in Congress. If they were to sit down with the Dalai Lama they would find him to be a man of peace and reconciliation. And I think it’s in the country’s interest to allow him to come to China and meet with him.”

In his acceptance speech, the Dalai Lama outlined his concerns about the future development of China and Tibet:

“I believe it is vital for China to have transparency, rule of law and freedom of information. Much of the world is waiting to see how China’s concepts of “harmonious society” and “peaceful rise” will unfold. Today’s China, being a state of many nationalities, a key factor here would be how it ensures the harmony and unity of its various peoples. For this, the equality and the rights of these nationalities to maintain their distinct identities are crucial.

...Let me take this opportunity to once again appeal to the Chinese leadership to recognize the grave problems in Tibet, the genuine grievances and deep resentments of the Tibetan people inside Tibet, and to have the courage and wisdom to address these problems realistically in the spirit of reconciliation.”

The bill to award the Dalai Lama the Congressional Gold Medal, which was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Bush in September 2006, enjoyed broad bipartisan support. Congressional Gold Medal legislation requires three-quarters of Congress to co-sponsor before the bill will be considered, which is an especially high hurdle. Past recipients of the Congressional Gold Medal include George Washington, Pope John Paul II, and other Nobel Peace Laureates, such as Nelson Mandela and Elie Wiesel.

In China, the award ceremony prompted angry reactions from officials: “We are furious,” said the

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Romano Prodi and Chinese Premier Wen: But will Prodi give the Dalai Lama the same welcome?

Dalai Lama to visit Rome

The Dalai Lama will visit Rome in mid-December to attend the 8th Summit of Nobel Laureates, hosted by the Mayor of Rome, Walter Veltroni.

Speculation is mounting over whether Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi will follow the lead of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, US President George W. Bush and Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper and meet publicly with the Dalai Lama during the visit. In a letter to Prime Minister Prodi, ICT has called on

him to “stand with these global leaders by meeting openly and officially with His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Rome,” and that such a meeting “can make a difference to the six million Tibetans living under Chinese rule and signal to the world that the Italian government stands by the efforts of the Dalai Lama to resolve this tragic situation through tolerance, peace and the spirit of reconciliation.” ■

US awards Dalai Lama...

Chinese Communist Party’s secretary for Tibet, Zhang Qingli. “If the Dalai Lama can receive such an award, there must be no justice or good people in the world.”

Tibetans greeted the award ceremony with jubilation despite a stepping up of security and severe restrictions on religious practice in Lhasa and areas of eastern Tibet. The Voice of America broadcast the Congressional Gold Medal award ceremony live to Tibet via radio, television and the internet, although it is unclear how many Tibetans would have been able to witness the broadcast, given high levels of jamming of VOA’s service.

One of the major monasteries in Lhasa, Drepung, was sealed off and surrounded by armed troops after police stopped an attempt by monks to peacefully mark the honour to the Dalai Lama. Tibetan sources reported

a build-up of armed police in the city, checkpoints on roads out of Lhasa, and an order to Lhasa citizens not to carry out any religious or celebratory activities.

At Labrang monastery in the Tibetan area of Amdo, armed police stopped fireworks being set off and surrounded the monastery with armed troops and according to eyewitness reports, police clashed with monks and laypeople. According to other reports, internet bars were closed in some areas, and two well-known Tibetan websites, focusing on Tibetan language and literature, were closed down.

For more on the Congressional Gold Medal, including a webcast of the event and transcripts of speeches, visit www.savetibet.org/news. ■



Runggye Adak



Lupoe Adak



Kunkhyen



Jarib Lothog

Harsh sentences follow Lithang protests

Runggye Adak, the Tibetan nomad who took to the stage during the Lithang Horse Festival on August 1 and called for the Dalai Lama's return to Tibet, has been jailed for eight years on charges of 'inciting to split the country', according to a statement released by Xinhua on November 20. Runggye Adak's nephew, Adak Lupoe, a senior monk from Lithang monastery, received a longer sentence of ten years, and Tibetan art teacher and musician Kunkhyen was jailed for nine years, both for attempting to provide pictures and information to 'overseas organizations' which were judged to 'endanger national security'. A fourth Tibetan, Jarib Lothog, was sentenced to three years in prison linked to the same case.

It is significant that the two Tibetans allegedly reporting on the event were sentenced to longer terms than the perpetrator, and may be intended to convey an intimidatory signal to Tibetans about passing on news about unrest or dissent to the outside world, particularly in the run-up to the summer Olympics in Beijing.

According to a Tibetan source, during his trial in Dartsedo, Runggye Adak, a father of 11 children and a respected figure in his local nomadic community, told the court that he did not carry out his protest in favor of the Dalai Lama to be a hero. He said: "I wanted His Holiness to return, and wanted to raise Tibetan concerns and grievances, as there is no outlet for us to do so. That made me sad and made me act." Runggye Adak's government-appointed lawyer reportedly argued that asking for the return of the Dalai Lama to Tibet was purely a religious action, and not an act to bring down the government.

In a press statement, the International Campaign for Tibet condemned the sentences, saying "An eight year prison sentence for expressing a wish that is commonly held among Tibetans, the return of the Dalai Lama to Tibet, reveals the crackdown against fundamental freedoms in Tibet today and does not square well with the image China wants to present to the world in the build-up to the Olympics. These hardline, confrontational strategies only risk creating further dissent and unrest, and do not support China's wish for genuine stability in the region."

Xinhua stated that the actions of 52-year old Runggye Adak (Chinese transliteration: Rongji Azha), led to "public besieging of government offices...because local people were not clear about the truth", which the court said was a severe disruption of public order. This refers to the gathering of more than a hundred Tibetans in the compound of the local police station in Lithang where Runggye Adak was detained after his protest. Xinhua also reported that Adak Lupoe and Kunkhyen were sentenced at the Kardze Intermediate Court for spying for overseas organizations after they took pictures, made discs, and "provided them to overseas organizations" via Jarib Lothog. "Some contents leak intelligence that endangers national security and interest," the court said in its verdict (Xinhua, November 20, 2007).

Since the incident on August 1, there has been a military crackdown in Lithang in eastern Tibet, and a climate of fear in which Tibetans are often too frightened to speak to friends and family on the telephone. Expressions of support among Tibetans for Runggye Adak's statements at the horse festival led to the launch of an intense 'patriotic education' campaign throughout Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, in present-day Sichuan (the Tibetan area of Kham). According to accounts in the official press, the entire month of September was given over to intensive "concentrated patriotic education activities" in which government workers had to express support for the government's handling of the 'August 1 incident', as Runggye Adak's protest is referred to. At the prefectural communications bureau, all staff, including retired staff, at the bureau were required to take two days a week to study Marxist theory on religion and ethnicity as well as the 'August 1 incident'. (Ganzi Daily, September 5, 2007). ■

Domestic political agenda behind German-China policy debate

The meeting between German Chancellor Merkel and the Dalai Lama in October has spurred debate on Germany's China policy between the two parties of the Grand Coalition, Chancellor Merkel's Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and the Social Democrats (SPD), the party of Foreign Minister Frank Walter Steinmeier.

The SPD has characterised the meeting as detrimental to Germany's relations to China, while CDU/CSU officials have defended Chancellor Merkel's right to "see people wherever and whenever she chooses". German observers see the debate on China policy as primarily an expression of intensifying cleavages within the Grand Coalition ahead of elections in important German states in 2008 that will set the climate for national elections in 2009. The SPD trail in the polls far behind Merkel's CDU/CSU. ICT-Germany has expressed its deep concern that the issue of Tibet should not become a subject of domestic party politics.

In October, the CDU/CSU also released a new strategic paper on Asia, which called for a diversification of strategic relationships in the region and a move away from the Asia policy under the previous SPD government, which the chairman of the CDU/CSU Foreign Affairs parliamentary working group characterised as "too focused on China and its economy" and without sufficient linkage to progress on human rights. ■

US CONGRESSIONAL REPORT: Human rights in Tibet deteriorating

The US Congressional Executive Committee on China's 2007 report has concluded that "The human rights environment that the Communist Party and Chinese government enforce in the Tibetan areas of China has not improved over the past five years, and has deteriorated since 2005."

The almost 300-page annual report (available at www.cecc.gov) analyses the political and human rights situation across China, but this year the report included

a 'Special Focus' on Tibet. The CECC recommends that the US administration and Congress continue to urge a face-to-face meeting between the Dalai Lama and Chinese officials, the release of political prisoners and international access to the 11th Panchen Lama, as well as increased funding to assist Tibetans in protecting their culture, language and heritage.

The CECC comprises US Representatives, Senators and members of the Executive Branch, including State Department officials Paula Dobriansky, Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs, and Christopher R. Hill, Head of the U.S. delegation to the Six-Party Talks on the North Korean nuclear issue. ■

EP President Poettering calls for EU action on Tibet

Hans-Gert Poettering, President of the European Parliament, has called on the EU to play a greater role in resolving the situation of Tibet. In a speech at the European Parliament's Conference on Tibet in November, Poettering said that the EU could play a useful intermediary role in reaching a negotiated settlement and urged the EU Council to nominate a Special Representative for Tibet, a position the European Parliament has previously supported.

Poettering also raised the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement currently being negotiated between the EU and China, saying that "it is vital that in that framework the question of the future of the Tibetan people and also the question of human rights should find due place."

The EP Conference on Tibet, organised by ICT and the EP's Tibet Intergroup, brought together national and EU policymakers to discuss how the 2008 Beijing Olympics will impact Tibet and how China's environmental policies are affecting the Tibetan Plateau. ■