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ICT honors long-time activist Grace Spring with Light of Truth Award for being a symbol of activism for Tibet

On the auspicious second day of Losar, the Tibetan New Year, which fell on February 17, 2018, ICT President Matteo Mecacci bestowed a special Light of Truth award on Grace Spring in recognition of her many decades of work putting a spotlight on Tibet. The event took place in Burlington, VT, near Grace's current residence, and was held in conjunction with the Tibetan Association of Vermont's celebration of the Tibetan New Year. The Mayor of Burlington, Miro Weinberger, was present on the occasion.

Grace Spring is an artist, an activist and a Tibetan supporter who, for more than 18 years, held a solo vigil every Friday morning in front of the Chinese Embassy in Washington with a Tibetan national flag and a placard, drawing attention to the plight of the Tibetan people.

As Grace Spring arrived at the venue, she was received by Sonam Chopel, President of the Tibetan Association of Vermont, as well as members of the community and the guests who all gave her a moving standing ovation.

In his remarks before presenting the award, Matteo Mecacci recalled the many years that Grace has dedicated to the service of the Tibetan people, including being on the Board of the International Campaign for Tibet. He said often Grace wondered whether she served any useful purpose in staying on the Board and she was told by Board Chairman Richard Gere and then Special Envoy of H.H. the Dalai Lama, Lodi Gyari, that she needed to stay on the board because she represented the passion and love that thousands of Americans had for Tibet.

Mecacci told Grace that her photo in front of the Chinese Embassy in Washington, D.C. has become a symbol of activism for all of us.

Mecacci also recognized the presence at the event of Anne Thomas Donaghy, an ICT member and daughter of Lowell Thomas Jr., who visited Tibet to document the situation there for the international community. He said that when Grace was 12 and at a school in Florida, Lowell Thomas, Jr. had visited it and spoken about Tibet. Grace had later told the Washington Post that the talk had planted a seed in her about being interested in Tibet. Lowell Thomas, Jr. received the Light of Truth award in 2005.

In brief remarks, Grace said, "I just want you to know that this is a huge honor from the Tibetans. I am overjoyed on what has happened and may it be very wonderful ... Thank you so much."

Mayor Weinberger prefaced his greetings to the Burlington Tibetan American community by saying that it is an honor and "quite something" to have Grace in attendance. He said it is a very special thing for Vermont Tibetan community to receive such an honor to host the event.

Richard Gere, Chairman of the International Campaign for Tibet, in a letter conveying to Grace the Boards' decision to bestow her the Light of Truth, said it was to recognize "the countless contributions you have made to Tibet, the Tibetan people and His Holiness the Dalai Lama over the past several decades. You have been a fearless and committed activist- not just for our work at the International Campaign for Tibet, but to the broader Tibet movement."

He added, "I know this does not mean your work on Tibet is finished as I am certain that Tibet and the Tibetan people continue to be in your thinking at all times but what it does mean is that, we recognize you for your many, meaningful contributions to this work and we would like to honor the extraordinary light that you have shown to the Tibet issue."

In addition to serving on the Board of the International Campaign for Tibet, Grace founded an organization for Tibet in Washington, D.C., and had served as a regional director of the U.S. Tibet Committee.

The Light of Truth award was first presented in 1995 and is bestowed upon individuals and organizations that have made outstanding contributions to the public understanding of Tibet and the plight of the Tibetan people. Previous recipients include Archbishop Desmond Tutu, A.M. Rosenthal, Vaclav Havel, Elie Wiesel, Irmtraut Wäger, people of India, Chinese people who have stood up for Tibet, the Swiss Red Cross, and the International Commission of Jurists.