



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Tibetan-Americans and Tibet supporters will take their cause to Capitol Hill next week

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As Tibetans mark 60 years since the Dalai Lama was forced into exile, Tibetan-Americans and Tibet supporters will gather in Washington, DC next week to lobby members of Congress to support their cause.

The 11th annual Tibet Lobby Day—organized by the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT), a DC-based advocacy group—will bring more than 130 Tibetan-Americans and Tibet supporters to the nation’s capital for meetings with elected leaders and their staff.

The lobbying will be spread over two full working days: Monday, March 25, and Tuesday, March 26.

“Our Tibet Lobby Day event is an essential way for Tibetan-Americans to engage in the US political process and exercise their rights as American citizens,” ICT Vice President Bhuchung K. Tsering said. “As China’s repression in Tibet reaches new levels of severity, it’s crucial that supporters of Tibet make their voices heard in the halls of Congress.”

Important timing

Tsering noted that the timing of this year’s Lobby Day is significant: This month marks the 60th anniversary of China taking control of Tibet.

On March 17, 1959, His Holiness the Dalai Lama was forced to flee Tibet after an apparent attempt by Chinese troops to abduct or kill him. After a perilous journey, he reached safety in exile in India on March 31.

In the six decades since, the Dalai Lama has not been allowed to return to Tibet, and Chinese rule there has decimated Tibetans’ rich culture and religion while depriving them of their most basic rights.

Last month, the watchdog group Freedom House rated Tibet as the second-least free place on Earth, behind only Syria and worse than even North Korea.

Over the past 10 years, more than 150 Tibetans have self-immolated, lighting their own bodies on fire in a tragic act of protest.

Reasons for hope

Despite these dire circumstances, Tibetans have new reasons to hope—thanks to the US Congress.

In December 2018, the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act was signed into law with unanimous support from both the House of Representatives and the Senate.

The most important Tibet-related legislation since 2002, it takes aim at China's double standard of preventing American journalists, diplomats and ordinary citizens from entering Tibet while Chinese citizens travel freely throughout the US.

The law requires the State Department to deny US visas to the Chinese officials responsible for keeping Americans out of Tibet. On March 14, more than 30 parliamentarians across Europe published an op-ed calling for reciprocal access to Tibet for their countries.

"The success of the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act shows that skillful advocacy through the democratic process can have a significant impact both here in the US and around the world," Tsering said. "We look forward to speaking with Congressional leaders next week on fully implementing the new law and addressing other priorities," including funding for Tibetan programs and appointing a Special Coordinator for Tibetan issues, a position in the State Department that is mandated by law but has been left vacant for more than two years.