



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

State Dept. pushes back on China's criticism of Tibet access report

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A State Department spokesperson pushed back against China's criticism of the department's new report, which says the Chinese government "systematically" prevents Americans from entering Tibet.

"This is a well-documented report," Deputy Spokesperson Robert Palladino said at a press briefing on Tuesday, March 26, 2019, adding "statistics were kept."

The report, released on March 25, documents China's outrageous attempts to keep Americans out of Tibet in 2018, including repeatedly denying requests to visit from the US ambassador and other officials; directly threatening to expel journalists; and cruelly preventing Tibetan-Americans from seeing their homeland, which China has brutally occupied for the past 60 years.

Reciprocal Access to Tibet

The report is one of the first requirements of the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act, which was signed into law in December 2018 as the most important Tibet-related legislation in more than 15 years.

The law takes aim at China's double standard of keeping American journalists, diplomats and ordinary citizens out of Tibet even though Chinese citizens travel freely throughout the US. It requires the State Department to deny or revoke visas to the US for the Chinese officials involved in blocking US access to Tibet.

The department's new report shows that it is committed to carrying out those visa bans, said Matteo Mecacci, president of the International Campaign for Tibet.

"The report makes it clear that the United States government is serious about implementing the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act, and that China's systematic discrimination against US citizens won't be accepted in silence any longer," Mecacci said.

China's attacks

It's no surprise, then, that China immediately lashed out at the report.

According to news stories, China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang claimed the report "disregards the facts, is full of prejudice, and the Chinese side will never accept it."

Tellingly, Geng was speaking at a press conference in Beijing. The Tibet Autonomous Region, which spans about half of Tibet, is currently completely closed off to outside visitors, including foreign media.

State Department response

When Palladino was asked about Geng's comments, he defended the report and said the US is merely seeking reciprocity from China.

Palladino also reaffirmed the US government's support for Tibetans' autonomy and concerns about their lack of human rights.

Transcript of Palladino's remarks

On the State Department's report:

“So pursuant to the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act of 2018, as you allude, yesterday, the State Department submitted its first annual report to the Congress regarding United States access to Tibet. The report concludes that the Chinese Government, quote, ‘systematically impedes travel to the Tibetan Autonomous Region and Tibetan areas outside of the Tibetan Autonomous Region for US officials, journalists and tourists.’

“What we seek here is reciprocity—reciprocity from China regarding open access that China enjoys in the United States. We’re going to continue to work closely with the Congress in pursuit of that shared goal and make sure that Americans have access to the autonomous region and other areas as well.”

On Chinese criticism of the report:

“This is a well-documented report, statistics were kept, and we would note that when the Chinese government did allow access, the access was infrequent and highly restricted and scripted. We’re asking for reciprocity. That’s not something that the Chinese government would be subjected to in the United States. It’s not something that we think Americans ought to be subjected to in China. We’ll continue to advocate for shared reciprocity.”

On human rights in Tibet:

“Our policy on Tibet respects China’s territorial integrity, and we consider Tibet to be a part of China, but at the same time, we have been clear we’re deeply concerned by the lack of meaningful autonomy for the Tibetan people, the deteriorating human rights situation in Tibetan areas and severe restrictions on religious freedom and cultural rights there. So we will continue to urge China to cease restrictions on the human rights of Tibetans as well as their religious, cultural and linguistic identity.”