



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Mourning the loss of George H.W. Bush, first President to meet the Dalai Lama

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President George H.W. Bush, who passed away on Nov. 30, 2018, was the first American President to meet with the Dalai Lama, paving the way for successive Presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama to follow.

George H.W. Bush and the Dalai Lama met on April 16, 1991, during the Dalai Lama's visit to Washington, D.C. Although the Dalai Lama started visiting the United States in 1979, during the time of President Jimmy Carter, it took 11 years for an American President to receive him.

Recalling this, the Dalai Lama told President George W. Bush, in a condolence message on Dec. 1, 2018, "I am saddened by the passing away of your father, President George H.W. Bush. I offer my profound condolences to you and your family at this difficult time.

"He was in fact the first American President that I was privileged to meet. I recall being deeply touched by your father's concern for the Tibetan people and the situation in Tibet. It is truly admirable to have lived over 94 years. While nothing can replace the loss of a father, we can rejoice in the fact that his was a meaningful life, dedicated to public service. I commend your parents for encouraging their children, including you my dear friend, to devote yourselves to the service of others."

Briefing the media on April 17, 1991, the then-White House Spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said, "The President met with him for about a half an hour last evening. They discussed the general situation in Tibet." He continued, "We have, however, repeatedly raised our concerns over human rights abuses in that country—I mean in Tibet—with the Chinese government, and we continue to urge the followers of the Dalai Lama and the Beijing government to resume a peaceful dialogue to resolve the problems between them."

The White House spokesman also highlighted the programmatic support that the United States was giving to the Tibetan people. He said, "The US also provides roughly a half million dollars a year in aid to Tibetan refugees in Nepal and India. In addition, the Voice of America has recently begun broadcasts in the Tibetan language."

Lobsang Sangay, president of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), conveyed condolences on behalf of the CTA and the people of Tibet, saying "Tibetans all around the world deeply feel this great loss. We will remember him in our thoughts and prayers."

Speaker of the Tibetan Parliament, Pema Jungney, recalled the resolute support extended by the deceased President Bush and his entire family during the history of Tibetan struggle and offered solidarity with the family members at this sorrowful time.