



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

ICT's "Why Tibet Matters" event spreads awareness, builds momentum for new bill

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The speaker of the House, the sister of the Dalai Lama and the chairman of the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) sat on a stage together, telling the crowd of about 300 people—plus many more watching online—why Tibet is vital to the future of our world.

That was the scene last week at ICT's event, "[Why Tibet Matters: The Relevance of Now and Why We Should Care](#)," held at the University of San Francisco's McLaren Conference Center.

The event, which was open to members of the public, brought together Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), Jetsun Pema, the Dalai Lama's younger sister, and Richard Gere, the [chairman of ICT](#), in conversation for the first time.

"We are very happy that so many of you have come here to hear us and to know something about Tibet," said Jetsun Pema, who for decades was the driving force behind the Tibetan Children's Village school system, which is part of the vastly successful efforts by [His Holiness the Dalai Lama](#) and the Tibetan leadership in exile to preserve the Tibetan language and culture for tens of thousands of Tibetan refugees.

Tibetan Policy and Support Act

The discussion among these two extraordinary women, with vastly different backgrounds, was moderated by Richard Gere and touched on a range of topics, from details about what motivated them in serving their communities, to what life used to be like in Tibet, to advice from the Dalai Lama on how to deal with the challenges that China poses.

One of the most significant parts of the conversation came toward the end when Richard Gere shared a question from the audience about the [Tibetan Policy and Support Act](#), a new bill in Congress that will upgrade US support for Tibet and protect the right of the Dalai Lama and [Tibetan Buddhists](#) to decide how his successor is selected.

Speaker Pelosi said that so far, she has not seen any opposition to the bill, which was introduced in the House and Senate in September. "We have bipartisan support in both houses," she said.

However, she voiced a warning about the likelihood of China attempting to stop the legislation from becoming law.

“So far, we haven’t seen the Chinese government rear its head in Washington, DC on this subject,” Speaker Pelosi said. “You know they’ll weigh in, but so far, so good.”

Speaker Pelosi then thanked her fellow speakers, ICT and other Tibet supporters for their determined [advocacy for Tibet](#), which makes a difference in raising awareness within Congress.

Richard Gere added that the Tibetan Policy and Support Act is the “number one priority” for ICT, and added that the Dalai Lama has “made it very, very clear, and he’s been steadfast, he will not be reborn in a Chinese-controlled area. So that’s it. Final.”

Memories of Tibet

At another point in the conversation, Speaker Pelosi recalled her [surprise visit to Tibet in 2015](#) as the leader of a Congressional delegation.

She said she encountered an [atmosphere of mass surveillance](#), with cameras everywhere. But she also had the chance to visit the room in the Potala Palace where the Dalai Lama had once lived.

“This is where he was as a young person,” she said. “And this is where we must make sure he can return.”

Jetsun Pema, who spent her early childhood in Tibet, said she had a “very happy life” there prior to China’s invasion in 1949-50.

But when she returned to Tibet in 1980 as the head of a fact-finding delegation, it was a “very sad experience” because she saw what Chinese rule had done to the formerly independent country, including the deaths of more than 1 million Tibetans, the spread of starvation and the loss of young people’s ability to understand the written Tibetan language.

Jetsun Pema pointed out that conditions in Tibet have only deteriorated since then, with fewer refugees even able to escape for education and a better life abroad. “I think in Tibet, the situation is becoming worse and worse,” she noted.

Why Tibet Matters

Despite the deepening oppression inside Tibet, all three speakers highlighted the Tibetan people’s remarkable success in keeping their culture, language and Buddhist faith alive in exile.

Richard Gere talked about the joy he feels in seeing now-adult Tibetans who remember meeting him decades ago in India or Nepal and who are now happy and successful, thanks to the education they received in exile. He then asked the many Tibetan youths in the conference center to stand up and be acknowledged with applause from the crowd.

Speaker Pelosi said Tibetans’ religious values, which are based on compassion and [nonviolence](#), have won the support of Congress “in a bipartisan, bicameral way.”

“We are all blessed and enhanced by the goodness of it all,” she said, “the love that His Holiness tells us to have in our hearts, the negative attitudes he encourages us to rid ourselves of.”

Jetsun Pema addressed what Tibetan culture can offer the world—if people [take action](#) to preserve it.

“I think helping the Tibetans is also saving the world to bring about more peace and compassion in the world,” she said. “This is something which I think everybody can do.”

In addition to Speaker Pelosi, Jetsun Pema and Richard Gere, ICT President Matteo Mecacci gave introductory remarks during the event, as did Richard Blum, a longtime supporter of the Tibetan people, on behalf of his wife, Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.).

[Watch a recording of the event on ICT’s Facebook page >](#)