



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Exciting news shared at ICT's Dalai Lama Nobel Prize 30th anniversary event

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It started as a joyous and moving look back at the Dalai Lama winning the Nobel Peace Prize 30 years ago. And it ended with a promising look into the future for the Tibetan people.

That was the way events unfolded on Tuesday night, Dec. 10, at the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) in Washington, DC, where dozens of people gathered to celebrate the anniversary of the Dalai Lama receiving the distinguished prize in 1989.

Tibetan Americans, Tibet supporters and government leaders all took part in the activities, including Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Sam Brownback, who had exciting news to share with the crowd.

Reciprocal access

During his remarks, Brownback addressed the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act (RATA), which became law last year.

The legislation, which targets China's forced isolation of Tibet from the outside world, requires the State Department to deny or revoke visas to the US for the Chinese officials responsible for keeping American diplomats, journalists and ordinary citizens out of Tibet.

On Tuesday night, Brownback said the State Department will produce a report this month saying which Chinese officials have been denied entry to the US under RATA.

ICT President Matteo Mecacci noted that "this is very meaningful."

"RATA received unanimous, bipartisan support in Congress, but its effectiveness was always going to depend on how seriously the State Department implemented it," Mecacci said later. "With Ambassador Brownback, a member of the State Department, announcing that the report of who has been banned from entering the US under RATA will be sent to Congress this month, we are hopeful that the department will fully and effectively implement it."

Ready to fight for Tibet

Brownback had other encouraging words to share with Tibet supporters, noting that China's attacks on Tibetans' religious freedom cannot succeed in the long run.

“They can be successful for a period of time,” he said. “But Tibetan Buddhism is going to outlast the Chinese government. And we are here to stand with you and to be a part of this fight.”

The Netherlands, too, will be a part of the fight, said Martijn van Helvert, a member of the Dutch Parliament, who pledged that his country will fight for Tibetans’ human rights.

“And of course Tibetans may choose their own Dalai Lama” after the current one passes away, he said, “because that’s a blessing for the people of Tibet and not a blessing for the government of China.”

Praise for the Dalai Lama

That willingness to fight was also expressed by Rep. Andy Levin (D-Mich.).

“I’m a new member of Congress,” Levin said, “and I’ve just arrived, and I’m ready to work as long as it takes, and as difficult as the fight is, to lift up the Tibetan community and save Tibetan culture in Tibet.”

Although Levin is new in Congress, he has been a supporter of Tibet for decades. He studied the Tibetan language as a graduate student and tried to enter Tibet in 1989 but was stopped in part because of the Tiananmen Square Massacre.

After returning to the US, he interviewed the Dalai Lama in Los Angeles, just a few days before it was announced that the Dalai Lama had won the Nobel Prize.

“He was a real hero of mine,” Levin said.

Levin added that he spent a year studying in Sarnath, India at what is now called the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, and he sprinkled Tibetan phrases into his speech on Tuesday night to the surprise of the crowd.

Rep. Ted Yoho (R-Fla.), whose retirement from Congress was announced earlier that day, highlighted a resolution he co-introduced in the House of Representatives last month that praises the Dalai Lama’s commitment to nonviolence and calls for a bipartisan forum between Congress members and the Tibetan spiritual leader.

Noting that he sits on the House Foreign Affairs Committee with Levin, Yoho said, “As Andy and I know, the things that we hear about and we see, we need more Dalai Lamas...We need more of those around the world to show tolerance, peace, prosperity and just a way of life that if we all adhered to, this world would be a lot better place.”

30th anniversary

It was not surprising that a Republican and a Democratic member of Congress spoke together at the event, even during this uniquely divided time in the nation’s capital.

ICT Vice Chairman Gare A. Smith said that he was working for the late Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.) when the Dalai Lama received the Nobel Peace Prize 30 years ago.

“I had never, at that time, seen anything that was more unifying among the parties, then or today, than His Holiness the Dalai Lama,” Smith said, adding, “It really didn’t matter who you were or where you sat, everyone supported His Holiness, and everyone supported His Holiness’ message of peace.”

Smith noted that the Dalai Lama winning the prize helped propel ICT, which had been founded just one year earlier.

Tenzin Tethong was ICT’s first president. He was also there in Oslo, Norway in 1989 when the Dalai Lama received the Nobel Prize.

“Every Tibetan has memories of that day,” Tethong said. “They know exactly where they were and what happened that day.”

Looking forward

Tethong added that even though the Dalai Lama had already received many awards by then, the Nobel was special because it validated his life’s work and the suffering of the Tibetan people.

Even though 30 years have passed since then, “Tibet still needs a resolution,” Tethong said, “and His Holiness still needs to go back to Tibet.”

In addition to the different speakers during the event, Shingza Rinpoche, a Tibetan Buddhist monk and activist, led the gathering in prayers.

Ngodup Tsering, representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to North America, House and Senate staffers, NGO representatives and ICT Board Members, members and volunteers also took part in the event.