



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

European countries weigh in on Tibetan Buddhists' right to pick next Dalai Lama

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Belgium and the Netherlands have weighed in on the rights of the Tibetan Buddhists by declaring that it is up to the Tibetan religious community to select the future Dalai Lama, rejecting China's efforts to control the succession of the revered Tibetan leader.

In response to a question from Member of Parliament Samuel Cogolati on his government's position, Belgian Foreign Affairs and Defense Minister Philippe Goffin said last month, "it is logically up to the Tibetan religious community to designate his successor without interference from the temporal authorities."

Similarly, in an official letter in late 2019, Dutch Foreign Affairs Minister Stef Blok said, "The position of this cabinet is that it is up to the Tibetan religious community itself to appoint a future successor to the Dalai Lama."

Rejecting Chinese interference

The Dalai Lama is now 84. According to Tibetan Buddhist beliefs, a Dalai Lama can choose to reincarnate after his eventual death in order to benefit humankind.

However, the Dalai Lama—who initiated Tibetans transition to a democratic form of governance in exile—has said the decision of whether or not to continue with the institution of the Dalai Lama after he dies should be made by Tibetans and followers of Tibetan Buddhism.

But in a gross subversion of religious freedom, China—which has brutally occupied Tibet since forcing the Dalai Lama into exile in 1959—says the selection of the next Dalai Lama must be approved by the Chinese government.

China's goal is to install a puppet in the role in order to gain control over the Tibetan people and spread Beijing's propaganda around the globe.

Tibetan Policy and Support Act

The US government has already taken action to challenge China's claim over the issue of reincarnation. Administration officials, including the US Ambassador for International Religious Freedom Sam Brownback, have publicly stated that the rights of the Tibetan Buddhists to decide on the matter of the Dalai Lama's reincarnation has to be respected by the Chinese government. Also, Members of Congress have introduced the Tibetan Policy and Support Act, a bipartisan bill that will

make it official US policy that only Tibetan Buddhists can decide on the Dalai Lama's succession and will sanction Chinese officials who attempt to name their own Dalai Lama in the future.

The House voted overwhelmingly to pass the bill last week, and the Senate is expected to take it up soon.

International coalition

The TPSA calls on the State Department to build international coalitions to oppose any effort by China to interfere in the Dalai Lama's succession. No doubt the recent statements from Belgium and the Netherlands will help that with that effort.

In his remarks, Goffin, the Belgian minister, said, "I can assure you that the human rights situation in Tibet is an issue that we will continue to actively monitor. In this respect, Belgium will continue to contribute constructively to the position coordinated by the European Union."

And Blok, the Dutch minister, said his government "encourages China to remain in dialogue with representatives of the Tibetan community inside and outside of China."

In March, the International Campaign for Tibet will lead a Tibet Lobby Day in Europe and the United States that, among other things, will call on governments to support the religious freedom of the Tibetan people, including on the matter of the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama.