



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

US commission says Congress should pass Tibet support bill

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Congress should pass a new bill that will promote religious freedom in Tibet and penalize the Chinese government for interfering in the Dalai Lama's succession, a US federal commission says in its new annual report.

The US Commission on International Religious Freedom's 2020 Annual Report, released today, highlights developments in religious freedom around the globe in 2019.

The report makes many references to Tibet, where the Chinese government enforces severe restrictions on Tibetan Buddhists' right to practice their beliefs and follow the teachings of their religious leaders.

Reincarnation of Tibetan lamas

In 2019, the "Chinese government continued to pursue a strategy of forced assimilation and suppression of Tibetan Buddhism, as demonstrated by the laws designed to control the next reincarnation of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and those of other Tibetan eminent lamas," USCIRF's report says.

For years, Chinese officials have said the reincarnation or succession of the Dalai Lama—a world-renowned Tibetan leader who has lived in exile for more than 60 years since China's brutal occupation of Tibet began—must meet with approval from the Chinese government.

To combat this brazen attempt at violating Tibetans' religious freedom, Congress last year introduced the bipartisan Tibetan Policy and Support Act, a comprehensive bill that, among many other things, will make it official US policy that only Tibetan Buddhists can decide on the Dalai Lama's succession.

If Chinese officials attempt to name their own Dalai Lama in the future, they will face sanctions under the TPSA.

The House of Representatives overwhelmingly approved the bill in January. Now the Senate needs to pass it—and President Trump needs to sign it into law—before the end of this year, or the TPSA will have to start over again in the House in 2021.

Congress should "support the Tibetan Policy and Support Act of 2019 (H.R.4331/S.2539) and other legislation designed to promote religious freedom in China," says the USCIRF report.

Religious repression continues

The report documents many other attacks by China against Tibetans' religious freedom last year, including:

- Demolishing thousands of residences at the Yachen Gar Buddhist academy, displacing as many as 6,000 nuns and monks
- Preventing new enrollment at the Larung Gar Buddhist academy
- Cracking down on Tibetans for owning or displaying photos of the Dalai Lama. In one instance, Chinese police detained a 75-year-old man and his son for listening to the Dalai Lama's teachings on their phone. They were later forced to sign a document promising never to listen to the Dalai Lama again
- Forbidding Tibetan schoolchildren from taking part in religious activities during their school breaks

Quotes

Tenzin Dorjee, USCIRF commissioner:

“China is the classic example of a ‘country of particular concern,’ or CPC, when it comes to religious freedom violations. Millions of Uighurs are kept in concentration camps and according to the latest Freedom House Report, Tibet is second only to Syria in terms of religious freedom and human rights violations. The situation in Tibet is worse than in North Korea according to the report and no international media has access to Tibet. To enslave Uighurs and Tibetans, China uses state of the art surveillance technology to collect DNA and sociodemographic information to restrict religious freedom and human rights. Even children are not allowed to learn their native languages and religions.”

“I applaud bipartisan efforts in the U.S. Congress to address religious and human rights violations in China. China’s forced disappearance of the Panchen Lama Gedhun Choekyi Nyima for over 25 years and its most serious interference into the recognition of His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s next reincarnation for a political agenda deserve stern condemnation and counter measures. Thank you to the U.S. Congress for passing the Reciprocal Access to Tibet [Act]. I urge the administration to implement [RATA] and urgently appoint a Tibet Coordinator to advance Sino-Tibetan dialogues for resolving issues based on mutually beneficial nonviolence and the Middle Way policy proposed by the Central Tibetan Administration and supported by the United States, European Parliament, and others. The time is now for serious multilateral government and global policy actions to end ‘systematic, ongoing, and egregious’ religious freedom and human rights violations in China, including in Tibet and Xinjiang.”

Matteo Mecacci, International Campaign for Tibet president:

“By adopting the Tibetan Policy and Support Act, Congress and the Trump Administration can send a strong message to the communist government in Beijing that its attempts to control and dominate the lives of Tibetan Buddhists and other people of faith will face serious consequences from the United States and its allies.”

“ICT thanks USCIRF for calling for the passage of the Tibetan Policy and Support Act and for producing this clarion report on the major violations of religious freedom in Tibet and other oppressed regions around the world. We would especially like to share our gratitude to Dr. Tenzin Dorjee, the first Tibetan American commissioner of USCIRF, who previously served as the commission’s chair, and whose tenure will end next month. Dr. Dorjee is a true hero in the Tibetan exile community, and his advocacy for Tibetan Buddhists and other oppressed people of faith is something in which we can all take pride. It has been a pleasure to work with Dr. Dorjee over these past few years, and we look forward to continuing to work with his fellow commissioners to advance the cause of international religious freedom.”



Phone: (202) 785-1515 | Fax: (202) 785-4343 | info@savetibet.org

ICT Europe
Funenpark 1D | 1018 AK
Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Phone: +31 (0)20 3308265
Fax: +31 (0)20 3308266
icteurope@savetibet.nl

ICT Deutschland e.V.
Schönhauser Allee 163 | 10435
Berlin, Germany
Phone: +49 (0)30 27879086
Fax: +49 (0)30 27879087
info@savetibet.de

ICT Brussels
11, rue de la lumière | 1060
Brussels, Belgium
Phone: +32 (0)2 609 44 10
Fax: +32 (0)2 609 44 32
info@save-tibet.eu