



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

US bans Chinese officials under Tibet access law

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In yet another action showing its intention to take China to task under the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act, the State Department announced today that Chinese Communist Party and government officials responsible for keeping Americans out of Tibet will be denied entry to the US.

In a statement today, Secretary of State Michael Pompeo said the department restricted visas for the officials under RATA, which forbids entry to the US by Chinese authorities “substantially involved” in creating and enforcing policies that keep American citizens out of Tibet.

“The United States seeks fair, transparent, and reciprocal treatment from the People’s Republic of China for our citizens,” Pompeo said. “We have taken several steps to further this goal. Unfortunately, Beijing has continued systematically to obstruct travel to the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) and other Tibetan areas by U.S. diplomats and other officials, journalists, and tourists, while PRC officials and other citizens enjoy far greater access to the United States.”

Reacting to the announcement, ICT President Matteo Mecacci said, “Through this decision about sanctioning Chinese officials responsible for denying access to Tibet to Americans, the US is sending Beijing a clear message that it will face consequences for its human rights abuses and continued isolation of Tibet from the outside world.” Mecacci added, “At the same time, the US government is letting the American people know it will stand up for their rights against China’s discrimination, including the rights of thousands of Tibetan American citizens who simply want the freedom to visit their family members and their ancestral land.”

The department did not publicly identify which officials it banned.

Unanimous, bipartisan support

The Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act received unanimous support in both houses of Congress when it passed in 2018.

President Trump signed the bipartisan bill—which Jim McGovern, D-Mass., and Randy Hultgren, R-Ill., introduced in the House of Representatives and Marco Rubio, R-Fla., and Tammy Baldwin, D-Wisc., introduced in the Senate—on Dec. 19, 2018, making it the most important Tibet legislation to become law in more than a decade.

RATA’s enactment came in response to China’s unfair exclusion of US citizens from Tibet.

Although Chinese citizens get to travel freely throughout the US, China almost always refuses to let American diplomats, journalists and tourists into Tibet.

In 2016, a Washington Post article said the Tibet Autonomous Region, which spans about half of Tibet, “is harder to visit as a journalist than North Korea.”

The few Americans who are able to visit Tibet have to travel on government-approved tours that hide the truth of China's severe human rights violations against the Tibetan people.

The situation is worst of all for thousands of Tibetan Americans, who face racial discrimination at Chinese embassies and consulates before their requests to visit their homeland—and the family members they had to leave behind—are cruelly rejected.

Furious Chinese response

As a first step in implementing RATA, the State Department released a report in March 2019 saying China “systematically impeded” American travel to Tibet in 2018.

The Chinese government responded to the report with fury. A foreign ministry spokesperson said the “the Chinese side will never accept it.”

Those comments echoed China's response when RATA passed Congress. At that time, a government spokeswoman said China “resolutely opposed” the law.

Growing calls for reciprocity

Despite China's anger, calls for reciprocal access to Tibet are growing.

Last month, 57 parliamentarians from 19 European countries published an op-ed calling on their governments to pass their own versions of RATA. British Conservative Party MP Tim Loughton introduced such a bill in the UK on Monday, June 6, the 85th birthday of the Dalai Lama.

The op-ed followed an opinion piece from Josep Borrell, the EU high representative for foreign affairs and vice president of the EU Commission, who said the focus of the EU-China relationship should be “trust, transparency, and reciprocity.”

In addition, President Trump has repeatedly called for “fair and reciprocal treatment” from China.

Statement from Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo:

“The United States seeks fair, transparent, and reciprocal treatment from the People's Republic of China for our citizens. We have taken several steps to further this goal. Unfortunately, Beijing has continued systematically to obstruct travel to the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) and other Tibetan areas by U.S. diplomats and other officials, journalists, and tourists, while PRC officials and other citizens enjoy far greater access to the United States.

“Therefore, today I am announcing visa restrictions on PRC government and Chinese Communist Party officials determined to be “substantially involved in the formulation or execution of policies related to access for foreigners to Tibetan areas,” pursuant to the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act of 2018. Access to Tibetan areas is increasingly vital to regional stability, given the PRC's human rights abuses there, as well as Beijing's failure to prevent environmental degradation near the headwaters of Asia's major rivers.

“The United States will continue to work to advance the sustainable economic development, environmental conservation, and humanitarian conditions of Tibetan communities within the People's Republic of China and abroad. We also remain committed to supporting meaningful autonomy for Tibetans, respect for their fundamental and unalienable human rights, and the preservation of their unique religious, cultural, and

linguistic identity. In the spirit of true reciprocity, we will work closely with the U.S. Congress to ensure U.S. citizens have full access to all areas of the People's Republic of China, including the TAR and other Tibetan areas.

International Campaign for Tibet President Matteo Mecacci Quotes:

“Through this decision about sanctioning Chinese officials responsible for denying access to Tibet to Americans, the US is sending Beijing a clear message that it will face consequences for its human rights abuses and continued isolation of Tibet from the outside world. At the same time, the US government is letting the American people know it will stand up for their rights against China's discrimination, including the rights of thousands of Tibetan American citizens who simply want the freedom to visit their family members and their ancestral land.

“The Chinese government has for a long time taken advantage of the freedoms—and access to markets—provided by democracies, without reciprocating, while building an Orwellian system of control. It is now critically important for the US and like-minded countries to demand China provide the same openness it receives from others.

“China's oppression of the Tibetan people won't stop tomorrow even with this law's implementation. But international pressure on the Chinese government to open up Tibet to the outside world is a vital step toward bringing justice and human rights back to Tibet.”



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