



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

At China Commission hearing, ICT president promotes updating Tibet policy

Read online: <https://savetibet.org/at-china-commission-hearing-ict-president-promotes-updating-tibet-policy>

September 30, 2020

Amid growing momentum for greater US action on Tibet, the president of the International Campaign for Tibet testified this morning about ways Congress and the administration can upgrade the country's Tibet policy.

“We look forward to working with the White House and Congress in our common objectives of supporting the people of Tibet to regain their rights and dignity,” Matteo Mecacci said today, Sept. 30, at a virtual hearing of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China.

Commission Chair Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass., and Co-Chair Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., led the hearing titled, “The Human Rights Situation in Tibet and the International Response.”

“US policy towards Tibet needs to be updated,” McGovern said in an opening statement, “and it needs to be strengthened.”

Others who testified at the hearing included Tenzin Dorjee, senior researcher and strategist of Tibet Action Institute; Sophie Richardson, China director of Human Rights Watch; and Zeekgyab Rinpoche, abbot of the Tashi Lhunpo Monastery, the traditional seat of the missing Tibetan Buddhist leader the Panchen Lama, whom China abducted 25 years ago.

Reps. Chris Smith, R-NJ, Thomas Suozzi, D-NY, and Andy Levin, D-Mich., and Sens. Angus King, I-Maine, and Steve Daines, R-Mont., joined McGovern and Rubio in delivering statements and asking questions during the hearing.

“The ongoing abuse of the Tibetan people, the effort to strip them of their ethnic and religious identity, is an outrage that’s been documented for a long time,” Rubio said, “but one that we cannot lose focus on.”

Disturbing developments

Responding to questions from the members of Congress, Mecacci explained why China’s policies in Tibet are so important.

Describing the Himalayan country—which the Chinese government annexed more than 60 years ago—as “an area of immense natural resources,” Mecacci said Tibet is the source of several of the largest rivers in Asia, providing water to more than 1 billion people downstream.

He added that China appears to have used its control of Tibet to block the flow of water to other countries, allegedly contributing to a major drought in Southeast Asia last year.

“As many analysts say, it’s possible that the next wars will not be about oil, but will be about water,” Mecacci warned.

He pointed out that Tibet has also been at the front lines of the Chinese government's recent aggression against India at the Indo-Tibetan border.

Although China could achieve long-term stability in Tibet by negotiating with the representatives of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan people, Mecacci said, "the Chinese government continues to try to pursue assimilation and total control to maintain their grip on power."

Recent US initiatives

In contrast to China's increasing repression in Tibet, the US government has recently stepped up its support for the Tibetan people, Mecacci said.

At the end of 2018, Congress passed the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act, which McGovern and Rubio helped introduce to take aim at China's unfair policy of keeping US journalists, diplomats and ordinary citizens out of Tibet, even though Chinese citizens are free to travel throughout the United States.

RATA was the first legislation to apply the principle of reciprocity in US-China relations, Mecacci said. And when the State Department implemented the law in July 2020, it for the first time banned from the United States the Chinese officials responsible for blocking Americans' access to Tibet.

RATA's success has led politicians from other countries to challenge China's isolation of Tibet from the outside world, with 57 parliamentarians from 19 European countries writing an op-ed in response to an ICT report on reciprocity in June; and another nearly 60 parliamentarians from around the globe demanding reciprocal access to Tibet just this month.

"Calling for reciprocity not only on economic and financial issues, but also for civil liberties and human rights, is an effective way to challenge China's narrative," Mecacci said in his testimony this morning, "but it should be done in a strategic, well-coordinated and international fashion, which is still not the case."

Tibetan Policy and Support Act

Mecacci added that in January, the House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed the bipartisan Tibetan Policy and Support Act, which would dramatically upgrade US political and humanitarian support for the Tibetan people.

Among other provisions, the TPSA will make it official US policy that only the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Buddhist community can decide on his eventual succession. If Chinese officials try to appoint their own Dalai Lama in the future, they'll face sanctions under the bill.

"China is also trying to control the Tibetan reincarnation system," Mecacci said. "After abducting the Panchen Lama and his family when he was just six years old in 1995, the Chinese Communist Party now plans to select the next Dalai Lama—an absurd claim that the international community needs to challenge decisively."

The TPSA is currently awaiting passage in the Senate.

Its approval "will be a powerful message of hope to the Tibetan people who are otherwise faced with daily oppressive policies by the Chinese authorities," Mecacci said.

Future support

Mecacci noted that the TPSA will expand the role of the special coordinator for Tibetan issues in the State Department, which has been vacant over the past four years.

Mecacci said whoever is president after the next election should nominate a special coordinator at the level of an undersecretary of state.

“The next administration, whether it is Republican or Democratic, should quickly appoint the special coordinator for Tibetan issues at the undersecretary level,” he said, “not at a lower level position, because doing that will send the wrong political message—of diminished US support for Tibet—both to the Chinese government and to the Tibetan people.”

Mecacci said ICT launched its Tibet 2020 campaign so that both major party presidential candidates “are apprised of the American people’s strong desire for Tibet to be a high priority.”

The campaign asks ICT members and other supporters of Tibet to contact the Democratic and Republican parties to urge them to include Tibet in their agendas.

“None of us are going anywhere”

The Tibet 2020 campaign will help ensure that US support for Tibet remains nonpartisan.

In his closing remarks, McGovern noted that, “Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives, have high regard for His Holiness the Dalai Lama. We revere him.”

McGovern said this is a historic time in US support for Tibetans: “We have probably legislated more on human rights issues in China and on Tibet than at any other time in our history, and we’re going to continue to do that.”

“I think the Chinese government is under this illusion that they can wear us all down ...” McGovern added. “That somehow this will just sort of go away, or when His Holiness the Dalai Lama is no longer with us, then we will no longer care about Tibet. That is a huge miscalculation. None of us are going anywhere. We are going to continue to focus in on this issue.”



International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) | 1825 Jefferson Place NW | Washington, DC 20036 | United States of America
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 linière | 1060
Brussels, Belgium
Phone: +32 (0)2 609 44 10
Fax: +32 (0)2 609 44 32
info@save-tibet.eu