



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Secretary Blinken, Richard Gere, Tibetan Americans celebrate Tibetan New Year

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In a first by a US secretary of state, Antony Blinken spoke at the State Department's annual Tibetan New Year reception, which also featured remarks by International Campaign for Tibet Chairman Richard Gere, Representative of the Dalai Lama, Tibetan and US leaders, and Tibetans across the country.

The virtual reception for Losar, the Tibetan New Year, streamed live today, Feb. 12, 2021, on Zoom and YouTube. The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor and the Office of International Religious Freedom co-organized the gathering with help from the International Campaign for Tibet.

The State Department has held the reception every year since 2015. Blinken is the first secretary of state to participate in it.

"Tibet's cultural legacy has thrived for more than 2,000 years, and the Biden administration is committed to preserving, protecting and honoring this linguistic, religious and cultural heritage," Blinken said. "Your rich traditions live on in those who celebrate today, not only in Tibet, but around the world.

"Just as they have for centuries," Blinken added, "your traditions continue to symbolize notions of love, compassion, justice, forgiveness, tolerance and peace. We look forward to celebrating these traditions with you during Losar and on many other occasions for years to come."

Losar celebration

The reception featured musical performances, video greetings and recited verse for Losar, which is one of the most important dates on the Tibetan calendar.

The event began with an introduction by Scott Busby, deputy assistant secretary in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, who welcomed viewers with the traditional Tibetan greeting of "Losar Tashi Delek."

Lisa Peterson, senior official for civilian security, democracy, and human rights, also spoke during the event. Peterson emphasized US support for meaningful autonomy and human rights in Tibet, which the Chinese government has brutally occupied for more than 60 years.

Ngodup Tsering, representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to North America, in his remarks, spoke about China's ongoing repression of the Tibetan people, as well as its persecution of Uyghurs, Hong Kongers and others.

"Although Losar is an occasion for celebration and jubilation, I cannot help but think of our brothers and sisters who continue to suffer in Tibet," Tsering said. "Their situation continues to be dire and needs our help more than ever," because of China's growing efforts to eliminate Tibetans' unique cultural and religious identity.

Tsering praised the US for recently enacting the bipartisan Tibetan Policy and Support Act, which dramatically upgraded US support for Tibetans, including by challenging China's attempts to interfere in the eventual succession of the 85-year-old Dalai Lama.

"I look forward to seeing the effects of the TPSA in the near future," Tsering said. "I feel confident that Tibetans are much better off with this new historic legislation."

Tibetan Americans

Tsering added that of the roughly 25,000 Tibetans in the United States, more than 60 percent are frontline workers, like doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals.

One of them is Lieutenant Commander Tenzin Jangchup of the US Public Health Service, who spoke during the event about deploying to COVID-19 hotspots during the pandemic.

Jangchup shared her incredible life story, which included growing up as a refugee in India, arriving in the United States at age 7 and using the support of the Tibetan American community—and the teachings of the Dalai Lama—to fuel her success as a health responder and a public servant dedicated to giving back.

"As the next generation of Tibetan Americans, I see us becoming experts in our own fields and serving in our own capacities to make our country and the world a better place to live for everyone," Jangchup said before symbolically presenting a khata—a Tibetan white scarf—to the United States government for the support it has given Tibetans.

In addition to Jangchup, Tibetan Americans Tsejin Khando and Tenzin Kunsel appeared at the event to perform a traditional Losar song. And Tibetan Tsering Bawa recited the Dreka, a series of auspicious verses for the New Year.

One of the highlights of the event was a video showing greetings from more than 20 Tibetan associations across the country.

In the video, introduced by ICT interim vice president Tencho Gyatso, members of the associations shared their wishes for a happy new year while dressed in traditional Tibetan clothing and standing in front of Losar altars.

Message from Richard Gere

Another highlight of the event was the video message by Gere, the actor, activist and philanthropist who has served as chairman of the International Campaign for Tibet since 1995.

In his remarks, Gere said Tibetans have brought to the United States "the idealism, I think, that maybe the US started with."

He said one of his proudest moments as an American citizen came in 2007, when he attended the Dalai Lama's Congressional Gold Medal ceremony in the US Capitol Rotunda.

On that day, President George W. Bush joined House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., and lawmakers from both parties to present the award to the Tibetan spiritual leader.

"When His Holiness spoke, I think everyone was in tears," Gere said. "Again, this feeling that this is what America is supposed to be.

"In that moment," Gere added, "the Dalai Lama was the first among Americans. And I think we also maybe reclaimed our ideals."

Gere encouraged staying “true to our commitments, both legal and moral, to help Tibetans all over the world, especially inside Tibet.”

State Department, Biden administration support for Tibet

At the end of the event, Busby, the deputy assistant secretary, said, “The United States remains firmly committed to Tibet and to the Tibetan people.”

Since the start of the Biden administration last month, the State Department has made several promises on Tibet.

On Feb. 5, during his first phone call with China’s top diplomat, Blinken said the United States will continue to push for human rights and democratic values in Tibet, according to a State Department spokesperson.

Blinken’s remarks followed comments the State Department made to Radio Free Asia, pledging that the US will pressure China to re-enter dialogue with the representatives of the Dalai Lama; end its interference in the selection of Tibetan Buddhist leaders; and respect Tibetans’ unique culture, religion, language and environment.

Biden himself has committed to supporting Tibetans. During the presidential campaign, he released a statement saying his administration “will stand up for the people of Tibet.”



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