



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

New Tibetan exile president congratulated by US leaders, interviewed

<http://www.savetibet.org/new-tibetan-exile-president-congratulated-by-us-leaders-interviewed>

May 26, 2021

In just a few hours, Penpa Tsering will swear in as the new president, or sikyong, of the Central Tibetan Administration. The CTA provides democratic governance for Tibetan exiles around the world.

The [Dalai Lama](#), the spiritual leader of the Tibetan people, will address the swearing-in ceremony virtually. Penpa [won the election for sikyong](#) last month after previously serving as speaker of the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile and representative at the Office of Tibet in Washington, DC.

The ceremony in Dharamsala, India will [stream live](#) at 12:25 am EDT on May 27, 9:25 pm PDT on May 26.

Congratulations for Penpa—and expressions of support for the Tibetan exile community—have been rolling in from around the world. Earlier this month, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price [tweeted](#): “The United States congratulates Penpa Tsering on his election as the Central Tibetan Administration’s (CTA) next Sikyong. We look forward to working with him and the CTA to support the global Tibetan diaspora.”

Penpa also received best wishes from the current sikyong, Lobsang Sangay, who [delivered his farewell address today](#) after 10 years as Tibetans’ exile political leader. In his remarks, Sangay discussed the growing belligerence of the Chinese government—which has [illegally ruled Tibet for more than 60 years](#)—as well as Tibetans’ success in gaining foreign support, including through the passage of the United States’ landmark [Tibetan Policy and Support Act](#) in 2020.

In a recent interview with a former China-based journalist and author, Penpa said the next five to 10 years will be crucial for the Tibetan cause. Below is a translation of that interview, as well as a letter of congratulations to Penpa from US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif.

Congratulations from Pelosi

The following is the text of [a letter House Speaker Nancy Pelosi](#) sent to Penpa.

May 25, 2021

*His Excellency Penpa Tsering
Sikyong
Central Tibetan Administration
Dharamshala — 176215 H.P.
India*

International Campaign for Tibet
1825 Jefferson Place NW | Washington, DC | 20036 | USA
Phone: (202) 785-1515 | Fax: (202) 785-4343
Press Contact: press@savetibet.org

Dear President Tsering:

Congratulations on your election as Sikyong of the Central Tibetan Administration! The Tibetan people will be well-served by the experience that you bring to this post after a long and distinguished career in public service.

More than 60 years after His Holiness was forced into exile, the resilience of the Tibetan people continues to inspire the world. Courageously standing strong against Beijing's repressive grip, the CTA has helped ensure the survival of your beautiful language, vibrant culture, and religious harmony. Now more than ever, your resolute voice and tireless leadership as Sikyong will be necessary to carry on this vital tradition and advance the cause of peace.

Today and always, America is proud to stand with you and the people of Tibet. Congratulations again, President Tsering, on your election, and best wishes for success in your new role!

best regards,

NANCY PELOSI
Speaker of the House

Interview of Penpa

This interview with Penpa was provided to the International Campaign for Tibet by former China-based journalist and author Marcel Grzanna. It has been translated from [the original German](#).

Sikyong Penpa Tsering, China's relations with its neighbors and those countries bordering the South China Sea, but also with the US, the EU, Australia and New Zealand have deteriorated significantly in recent years. What does this mean for the Tibet issue?

We Tibetans have been pointing out the nature of Chinese government for the last 60 years. Indeed, the international community is waking up only now, and maybe that will change the perspective on this conflict. In my eyes it's a Sino-Tibetan conflict, not just a Tibet issue. That's the reality. The world has hoped for Beijing to be more responsible. But those hopes have been dashed, since China's admission to the World Trade Organization in 2001. But the world is constantly changing, and global security or trade issues can change things quickly. We'll have to wait for common sense to prevail on the part of the Chinese government and then we'll see what happens next.

What could trigger such a change of mentality?

As a Buddhist, I believe in the law of impermanence. China seems very strong right now. When a country is ruled by one person, that person has to be responsible for all the right and wrong things. Of course, the Chinese government has political, military and economic power. But its weak point is its lack of moral power. In international relations, President Xi Jinping relies on antagonism. He will be held accountable for this strategy within the Communist Party. At the moment, China is not on the right track.

What are your goals for your tenure?

We'll try to push the Chinese government to resume the dialogue with the Tibetans that has been suspended since 2010. As a basis for negotiations, we stick to the Memorandum on Genuine Autonomy of 2008, in which we affirm the principles of the Middle Way Approach, an approach that was proposed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama; supported by the Tibetan people, and approved by the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile. It is the Chinese government's turn to formulate a counter-proposal if it is

not satisfied. It is about a solution that is acceptable to both sides and from which both sides benefit. One-sidedness doesn't help.

Will you reach out to the Chinese government through formal or informal channels?

I will find out from my predecessor Dr. Lobsang Sangay about the progress made on this matter so far and then look at all other options that needs to be pursued to explore all possible means and ways reach out to the Chinese government.

Are there any advocates of dialogue in the Chinese government?

As in any government and society, there are different views in China of how the conflict can be resolved. But the reality is also that under President Xi there seems to be no sense for urgency to solve the problem. If we look at Xinjiang, Hong Kong or Taiwan, or look at China's relations with all its neighboring countries, the EU and the USA, it currently looks as if the Chinese government is in no mood to resolve matters of national or international importance amicably. Let us hope better sense prevails over the Chinese leadership.

What is the reason for the urgency you are referring to?

China believes they have time, whereas Tibet is getting overwhelmed by the Chinese population, which amounts to cultural genocide. His Holiness the Dalai Lama is also ageing. Even though His Holiness has devolved his political and administrative responsibilities, He is the free spokesperson of all Tibetans under Article 1 of the Exile Charter. Therefore, a dialogue with the Chinese leadership must take place at least with the participation of the Special Envoy of the Dalai Lama while he is still alive. His Holiness is not part of the problem as the Chinese government claims, instead he is key to the solution.

The Dalai Lama is almost 86 years old.

And that's why time is crucial. His Holiness' influence on the Tibetans is fundamental. His advocacy for nonviolence is irreplaceable, because he is the only one who can exercise that influence. In the event of His Holiness passing away, it will be difficult. So, the next five to ten years will be decisive.

Don't you enjoy sufficient influence over the people as Sikyong yourself?

I am just a simple Tibetan. I do not command such influence or respect. Therefore, a solution must be found when His Holiness the Dalai Lama is still alive. Otherwise, it could be detrimental for both China and the Tibetan people. The Chinese government proved in Tiananmen Square in 1989 that it is ready to kill its compatriots to maintain power. It certainly would have no problem killing Tibetans. However, Tibetans have so far resisted from all kinds of violence.

As bargaining chip would it be conceivable to grant the Chinese government a say in the election of the religious leaders of the Tibetans, such as the Dalai Lama or the Panchen Lama?

Chinese interference in religious matters is absolutely not an option. We have been practicing Buddhism for almost 1400 years. Spirituality is in the center of our existence, they define our way of life. It is important for the Chinese government to understand that the Tibetans are not just concerned with material development, but with preserving our national identity. If the Chinese government doesn't understand that, then it can't solve the problem. Anyone who wants to get involved in religious affairs should first learn Buddhism.

Did you set up a time schedule for your intentions?

No, it is not in our hands, but with the Chinese government. We can only try to convince that dialogue is the best way to go. We are neighbors and we cannot change that. It makes sense to maintain good relationships with one another. His Holiness the Dalai Lama likes to refer to the European Union as an example of successful pacification of a region. Without the EU, there could have been more conflict

among EU nations. We expect the Chinese government to take into account the interests of all nationalities accordingly.

Chinese propaganda portrays the occupation of Tibet as the liberation of Tibetans from slavery. With it, prosperity came to Tibet. Is there anything you give credit to Chinese policy for the development of Tibet?

Our administrative system prior to the occupation by the People's Republic of China is certainly not something we Tibetans are particularly proud of. But that doesn't mean Chinese propaganda is right. We were free to practice our religion any way we wanted. Our society was certainly characterized by feudal structures. But a lot of nations have gone through this development. Tibet would have developed, too, if we have been free. His Holiness the Dalai Lama had already planned reforms in the 1950s. But we never got the chance to implement these reforms.

Do you see a need for reform within the government in exile?

The fundamental decision for the Middle Way cannot be overturned by Parliament or the Sikyong. This requires another referendum. If there is a better political option than the Middle Way, we are ready to listen. It is natural to have differences of opinion in a democracy. But if we begin to strive for independence, all doors to dialogue with the Chinese government could close.

What role do women play in Tibetan exile politics?

The number of seven ministries will remain the same as our charter provides. Among others, I will propose three women to the Parliament for ministerial posts. That will be the largest representation of women in the Tibetan cabinet.

Interview by Marcel Grzanna, former China correspondent and author of the German language "Eine Gesellschaft in Unfreiheit," a personal account of nine years reporting experience in China.