



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

World leaders celebrate Dalai Lama's 86th birthday

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From the Indian prime minister to the US House speaker and secretary of state, world leaders joined Tibetans and other followers of the Dalai Lama on July 6, 2021 to congratulate the spiritual leader as he turned 86.

“Spoke on phone to His Holiness the Dalai Lama to convey greetings on his 86th birthday,” India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi wrote on Facebook. “We wish him a long and healthy life.”

According to The Hindustan Times, the phone call lasted nearly 20 minutes. It was reportedly the first time in years that Modi has publicly acknowledged speaking with the Dalai Lama, who has lived in India for more than six decades since the Chinese government forced him to flee his home country of Tibet.

Several Indian ministers as well as provincial leaders, particularly from the states of Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim as well as Ladakh, which border Tibet, also issued public messages honoring the Dalai Lama on his birthday.

Other world leaders expressed support for the Dalai Lama’s efforts to promote justice and human rights for the people of Tibet, who face historic levels of oppression under Chinese rule.

“I have deep respect and appreciation for His Holiness’ grace, wisdom, and humility, as well as his dedication to greater global equality and the equal rights of all people, including his fellow Tibetans,” US Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken said. “I wish His Holiness the very best.”

World leaders also talked about the moral example His Holiness has set for people around the globe.

“Thank you for teaching us the importance of coming together to help one another through this pandemic,” Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen tweeted, sharing a quote from the Dalai Lama about the COVID-19 crisis and the need for compassion.

In addition, South African politician Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi released a statement saying: “As the world celebrates the 86th birth anniversary of the spiritual leader of Tibet, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, I am delighted to express my own good wishes to my friend. May he continue in good health, hope and happiness.”

Dalai Lama videos

For his part, the Dalai Lama released a birthday video saying, “I can assure you that for the rest of my life, I’m committed to serving humanity and working to protect the climate condition.”

In the video, His Holiness jokes about looking good despite turning 86.

“Many people actually love my smile,” he says, laughing. “In spite of my old age, my face is quite handsome.”

The Dalai Lama also expresses his appreciation for Indian concepts like “karuna” (compassion) and “ahimsa” (nonviolence).

“My dear friends, on my birthday, this is my gift,” he says. “Please keep it in mind. I myself am committed to nonviolence and compassion until my death. This is my offering to my friends. I hope my friends will also keep nonviolence and compassion for the rest of your lives.”

The next day, the Dalai Lama followed up with a video thanking all those who wished him a happy birthday, including Modi and other Indian officials.

“I want to thank all those people who really think about my life as something useful ...” he says. “As more people sincerely express in that way, that gives me determination, inner strength, that I must live as long a life as possible.”

His Holiness ends the video by saying he is determined to live to at least 110.

US support

In the video, His Holiness praises US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., who has repeatedly put her support for Tibet into action.

In her own video on the Dalai Lama’s birthday, Pelosi, speaking on behalf of the House of Representatives, celebrates the opportunity to honor His Holiness.

“It is an opportunity for all peace-loving people to recommit to our mission: to ensure that the Tibetan people can practice their faith, speak their language and celebrate their culture freely, without interference or intimidation from Beijing,” Pelosi says. “That is why the United States Congress, on a bipartisan and bicameral basis, House and Senate, has fought to hold China accountable.”

Pelosi specifically mentions the Tibetan Policy and Support Act, which became law at the end of 2020.

The legislation, which dramatically upgrades US support for the Tibetan people, takes aim at China’s outrageous plan to appoint its own Dalai Lama in the future, promising sanctions for any Chinese officials who attempt to interfere in His Holiness’ succession.

Members of Congress

One of the driving forces behind the Tibetan Policy and Support Act—as well as the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act, which Congress passed in 2018—was Rep. James McGovern, D-Mass., who described the Dalai Lama on his birthday as “a tireless advocate of peace and justice for the Tibetan people.”

“It is long past time for the Chinese government to listen to the Dalai Lama and to respect who he is,” said McGovern, who is co-chair of both the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission and the Congressional-Executive Commission on China.

The latter commission tweeted its own birthday greetings for the Dalai Lama and called for the release of Tibetans whom China imprisoned for celebrating His Holiness’ 80th birthday in 2015.

McGovern spoke as part of a video of Massachusetts leaders organized by the Tibetan Association of Boston and the Regional Tibetan Association of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Along with Tibetan Buddhist lamas and local officials, the video features messages from Congressmen Seth Moulton and Jake Auchincloss, as well as Sen. Ed Markey, the Democratic chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on East Asia, the Pacific, and International Cybersecurity Policy.

In the video, Markey glowingly recalls visiting His Holiness in his exile home of Dharamsala, India.

“All he does is emanate good karma for everyone and everything on this planet,” Markey says. “So happy birthday!”

In addition, Rep. Andy Levin, D-Mich., a longtime friend of Tibet, also shared birthday greetings for the Dalai Lama.

“In a period when the global pandemic has taken so much from us,” Levin said, “and forced us to consider our place within our communities, [His Holiness’] work on rights, dignity, and peace serves as a bright example during a difficult year.”

Sen. Tina Smith, D-Minn., also wished His Holiness a happy birthday, thanking the Tibetan American Foundation of Minnesota on Facebook and writing of the Dalai Lama: “You have touched the hearts and minds of many around the world.”

Tibetan leaders

In Dharamsala, Tibetans’ exile political leaders also expressed their commitment to His Holiness on his birthday.

“Happy Birthday, His Holiness the @DalaiLama, bodhisattva of infinite compassion, patron saint of Tibet and epitome of highest human aspirations,” tweeted Penpa Tsering, the recently elected president of the Central Tibetan Administration, which provides democratic governance for Tibetan exiles around the globe. “May Your Holiness continue to enjoy exuberant health and live for eons and eons to guide all beings to happiness, wisdom and dignity.”

The Tibetan “Kashag” (cabinet) also released a statement urging China to “earnestly invite His Holiness the Dalai Lama to Tibet and China on pilgrimage without any preconditions.”

Although China has not allowed the Dalai Lama to return home to Tibet since forcing him into exile in 1959, His Holiness has remained steadfast in calling for a nonviolent solution to the Tibetan issue.

He has advocated for the Middle Way Approach, which would allow China to retain control of Tibet in exchange for granting Tibetans meaningful autonomy.

The plan has received support from several world leaders, including former US President Barack Obama.

“The Chinese government should therefore recognize that His Holiness the Dalai Lama is the key to resolving the Sino-Tibetan conflict,” the Kashag wrote. “It should utilize the opportunity offered by the mutually beneficial Middle Way Approach to foster a harmonious environment where Tibetans and Chinese can co-exist amicably.”

ICT quote

To celebrate the Dalai Lama turning 86, the International Campaign for Tibet, a nonprofit that promotes human rights and democratic freedoms for the Tibetan people, asked its members around the globe to share birthday greetings for His Holiness.

So far, the organization has received more than 4,700 birthday messages for the Dalai Lama, with more expected to arrive in the coming days.

ICT Interim President Bhuchung K. Tsering said: “*The fact that so many people, including many world leaders, shared their best wishes for the Dalai Lama on his 86th birthday demonstrates not only the deep*

reverence they feel for His Holiness but also the continuing support of the international community for the Tibetan cause.

“At a time when China is raising its repression to unprecedented levels and the world is facing a number of political and environmental crises, the Dalai Lama at age 86 remains a beacon of hope and a source of inspiration to countless people around the globe.”



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