



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Dalai Lama Congressional Gold Medal ceremony remembered

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A recent 14th anniversary celebration of the Dalai Lama's Congressional Gold Medal featured video messages from an ex-member of Congress, a former US ambassador, a former NGO president and a board member of the International Campaign for Tibet.

The celebration on TibetTV aired to coincide with this year's anniversary of the Dalai Lama receiving the gold medal on Oct. 17, 2007 for his "many enduring and outstanding contributions to peace, nonviolence, human rights and religious understanding."

The award was a sign of the American people's love for the Tibetan leader, as well as the US government's bipartisan support for Tibet, a historically independent country that China has brutally occupied for more than 60 years.

"Awarding him the Congressional Gold Medal was a gesture of strong support and solidarity on behalf of the United States," former Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, who introduced the bill in the House of Representatives giving the Dalai Lama the gold medal, said in the TibetTV special. "The Congressional Gold Medal is reserved for the most heroic, courageous and outstanding individuals and is the highest award that may be bestowed by the legislative branch of the US government, as well as the nation's highest civilian honor."

Gold Medal ceremony

The video from TibetTV began with highlights of the Congressional Gold Medal ceremony 14 years ago.

On that day, President George W. Bush presented the award to the Dalai Lama in the US Capitol Rotunda, marking the first time a sitting US president has met the Tibetan leader in public.

Others who spoke at the ceremony included current House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., current Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., other Congressional leaders and the Dalai Lama's fellow Nobel Peace Laureate Elie Wiesel.

"I was so fortunate to be in the Capitol Rotunda that day," Kelley Currie, the former ambassador-at-large for global women's issues, said on TibetTV. "It was such a beautiful ceremony and one filled with such great affection and an abiding spirit of joy."

Currie added: "Whether it's his wisdom or his compassion, his pure humanity and his lovingkindness for all sentient beings ... it is an amazing experience to be around His Holiness [the Dalai Lama], to see what he does in a room full of people and how people just light up when he comes in."

Repression in Tibet

Although the Gold Medal ceremony marked a major milestone in the history of the Tibetan movement, the repression in Tibet has grown worse in the 14 years since.

Just recently, the watchdog group Freedom House declared Tibet the least-free country on Earth, in a tie with Syria.

“I look back on the presentation of the Congressional Gold Medal to His Holiness 14 years ago with joy and sadness,” retired National Endowment for Democracy President Carl Gershman said on TibetTV. “Joy because it was a glorious moment of recognition for a humble giant and sadness because the hopes expressed on that occasion have not been fulfilled.” Those hopes include the Dalai Lama’s wish that China would become more open, tolerant and responsible.

Gershman said the Chinese Communist Party regime will eventually perish, “but what will not perish is the will, the identity and the faith of the Tibetan people.”

Past and future

Keith Pitts, an International Campaign for Tibet board member and former Congressional staffer, looked back to 1991, when a previous event in the Capitol Rotunda brought together House and Senate leadership from both parties for a packed session with the Dalai Lama.

“The atmosphere was almost carnival-like. It was electrifying,” Pitts said. “I think that moment really consolidated bipartisan support for the Tibetan movement.”

That same year, President George H. W. Bush became the first sitting president to meet with the Dalai Lama when he welcomed the Tibetan Buddhist leader to the White House over the objections of the Chinese government.

“I guess a lesson here is bullying doesn’t work,” Pitts said, noting that the US Congress has passed several laws to help the Tibetan people in the 30 years since then, including legislation to support the Dalai Lama’s vision for a negotiated, peaceful settlement with China on the future of Tibet.

Ros-Lehtinen, the first Hispanic woman elected to Congress, said she looks forward to the day “when the first Tibetan American is elected to Congress and can bring the heartfelt insight and passion that comes from personal experience.”

TibetTV video

The TibetTV segment also featured remarks in Tibetan from Tsering Dolma of the Tibetan Women’s Association.

TibetTV is the official station of the Central Tibetan Administration, which provides democratic governance for Tibetans in exile.



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