



## INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

### **New US Tibet special coordinator should be proactive, ICT says**

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The International Campaign for Tibet welcomes the appointment of Uzra Zeya as the new special coordinator for Tibetan issues in the US State Department.

Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken announced today that Zeya, the undersecretary of state for civilian security, democracy and human rights, will serve as the special coordinator for Tibetan issues, effective immediately.

Zeya, who has decades of high-level experience in US foreign policy—including on the issue of Tibet—will now serve as the Biden administration’s point person on efforts to help resolve the Tibetan issue, promote Tibetan identity, protect Tibetan culture and heritage and support the human rights of the Tibetan people, who have lived under China’s oppressive rule for more than six decades.

Zeya will be the first Indian American to serve in the role. India is home to the world’s largest population of Tibetan exiles.

“The International Campaign for Tibet welcomes Uzra Zeya’s appointment as the new US special coordinator for Tibetan issues,” ICT Interim President Bhuchung K. Tsering said. “We anticipate that as someone familiar with the Tibetan issue, Zeya will work proactively at promoting dialogue between the Dalai Lama’s envoys and the Chinese leadership, as well as at advocating for US interests in Tibet, and advancing the cause of Tibetan Americans and Tibetans around the globe.

“As mandated by the Tibetan Policy and Support Act of last year, we urge Special Coordinator Zeya to proactively take the lead in gathering support from like-minded countries to formulate a common approach on the Tibetan issue. We look forward to working with Special Coordinator Uzra Zeya.”

Zeya’s appointment follows bipartisan letters from Congress sent to Zeya on Dec. 14 under the assumption that she would become the next special coordinator. The letters—led by Sens. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., and Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., and Reps. Jim McGovern, D-Mass., and Chris Smith, R-NJ—lay out several areas where Congress and the administration can work together to advance US policy on Tibet.

Namgyal Choedup, representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Central Tibetan Administration to North America, said: “On behalf of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Central Tibetan Administration, I congratulate Under Secretary Uzra Zeya on her appointment as the Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues. We look forward to working closely with her, particularly on resolving the issue of Tibet through the Middle Way Approach. We would also like to thank both the US Congress and Administration for their unwavering support to His Holiness the Dalai Lama and for the just cause of Tibet.”

Blinken said: “This designation demonstrates the Administration’s commitment to advance the human rights of Tibetans, help preserve their distinct heritage, address their humanitarian needs, and meet environmental and water resource challenges of the Tibetan plateau.”

### **Special coordinator for Tibetan issues**

The special coordinator for Tibetan issues is responsible for:

- promoting meaningful dialogue on Tibetan autonomy between the People’s Republic of China and the Dalai Lama or his representatives
- protecting the unique religious, cultural and linguistic identity of Tibetans
- pressing China to respect the human rights of the Tibetan people.

As special coordinator, Zeya will have to engage Tibetan leaders and international partners to address US concerns regarding Tibet.

She will also coordinate US efforts to address the humanitarian needs of Tibetan refugees and promote sustainable economic development and environmental conservation on the Tibetan Plateau.

The position of special coordinator has existed since then-Secretary of State Madeleine Albright named Greg Craig the first special coordinator for Tibetan issues in 1997.

Today, the appointment of a special coordinator is a mandate of the Tibetan Policy Act of 2002.

Zeya’s appointment revives another important tradition. Since the passage of the TPA, the special coordinator had been an official at the undersecretary of state level, until the previous Trump administration lowered it to an assistant secretary-level position.

By appointing Zeya, another undersecretary, to the role, the State Department has sent a message to the Tibetan people and the Chinese government about how seriously it plans to take the issue of Tibet.

## **Zeya’s past work on Tibet**

Although she is new to the role of special coordinator, Zeya is not new to Tibet.

In 2013, while serving as acting assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor, Zeya led a US delegation that met with Chinese counterparts as part of the 18th US-China Human Rights Dialogue in Kunming, China.

After the meeting, Zeya told reporters the delegation “expressed deep concern about China’s stepped-up attempts to silence dissent and tighten controls over Tibetans and Uighurs, emphasizing that policies ostensibly designed to maintain stability are counterproductive when they deny Chinese citizens their universal human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

She added: “We also urged the Chinese government to engage in substantive dialogue with the Dalai Lama or his representatives, without preconditions.”

Zeya also raised with Chinese officials the case of Dhondup Wangchen, a Tibetan filmmaker whom Chinese authorities arrested and tortured after he made a documentary about China’s repression in Tibet before the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

In addition, at the Universal Periodic Review of China’s human rights record at the United Nations in 2013, Zeya met with Kai Mueller, ICT’s UN advocacy coordinator and executive director of ICT Germany, as well as with other NGO representatives.



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