



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Desmond Tutu's Tibet support remembered

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When Archbishop Desmond Tutu received the International Campaign for Tibet's Light of Truth award in 2006, he drew on his experience dismantling South Africa's apartheid regime to appeal to Chinese oppressors of the Tibetan people.

"We used to say to the apartheid government: you may have the guns, you may have all this power, but you have already lost," Tutu stated. "Come: join the winning side. His Holiness [the Dalai Lama] and the Tibetan people are on the winning side."

Tutu, an icon of [nonviolence](#) and spiritual leadership who helped bring down apartheid in his homeland and campaigned for justice around the world, died Sunday, Dec. 26, 2021, at age 90.

Tutu [received the Light of Truth award](#) 15 years ago for his significant contributions to public understanding of Tibet, which the [government of China has brutally occupied](#) for [over six decades](#).

Tutu's death on the day after Christmas was mourned by Tibetans across the globe—including his longtime friend and fellow Nobel Peace Laureate the [Dalai Lama](#)—who took inspiration from Tutu's moral vision and unyielding support for their cause.

ICT also [mourns Tutu's passing](#).

Olympics protest

Tutu's dedication to Tibet was on vivid display in 2008 when he [spoke alongside ICT Chairman Richard Gere at the Peace Rally and Vigil for Tibet](#) that brought thousands to San Francisco's United Nations Plaza during the run-up to the Summer Olympics in Beijing.

China will [again host the Olympics](#) in a few weeks for the 2022 Winter Games.

The rally in San Francisco took place just before the Olympic Torch Relay passed through the city for its only stop on US soil that year.

During his remarks, Tutu told the massive gathering, "what we are saying to the heads of state, to President George Bush, is, 'For goodness' sake, don't go to the Beijing Games ... for the sake of our children, for the beautiful people of Tibet. Don't go!'"

For this year's Olympics, the [Biden administration has already announced a diplomatic boycott](#): US officials will not travel to China for the Games.

Other countries—including Australia, Canada, Kosovo, Lithuania and the United Kingdom—have also imposed a diplomatic boycott. However, some governments have refused, while others have not yet decided.

At the rally in 2008, Tutu [reminded the crowd](#) that, “it was people like you who demonstrated on our behalf, it was people like you who boycotted South African goods on our behalf.”

“And today apartheid—which at the time looked invincible—is destroyed ...” he said. “I thank you for continuing that tremendous tradition to stand for freedom.”

[Watch Tutu speak at the Peace Rally and Vigil for Tibet in 2008.](#)

Earlier in 2008, Tutu [urged the UN high commissioner for human rights to visit Tibet](#) amid [China’s severe crackdown on peaceful mass protests](#) that had broken out across the Tibetan Plateau.

Joy with the Dalai Lama

Tutu’s support for Tibet has included his deep spiritual brotherhood with the Dalai Lama, who [received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989](#) five years after Tutu won the award.

When Tutu received the [Light of Truth](#) in 2006, the Dalai Lama presented it to him.

A few years later, Tutu publicly criticized the South African government after it refused to grant the Dalai Lama a visa to attend Tutu’s 80th birthday celebration, allegedly out of fear of offending the Chinese government.

Tutu later visited the Dalai Lama for the [Tibetan leader’s 80th birthday](#) in 2015 in his exile home of Dharamsala, India. Tutu even danced on stage next to his Buddhist friend.

Like the Dalai Lama, Tutu was known for his irrepressible smile and playfulness. The two men co-authored 2016’s “The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World,” and appeared together in an accompanying movie, “[Mission: Joy](#),” that premiered this year.

Tutu and the Dalai Lama also appear with several of their fellow Nobel Peace laureates in [ICT’s 2001 documentary, “Tibet’s Stolen Child,”](#) about the high-ranking [Tibetan Buddhist](#) leader the Panchen Lama, whom [Chinese authorities kidnapped when he was just 6 years old](#).

In the documentary, Tutu addresses China’s unwillingness to [negotiate with Tibetan leaders in good faith](#) on a solution that would bring [meaningful autonomy to Tibet](#).

“The Chinese, they don’t think it is conceivable now. It’s thinking the unthinkable,” Tutu says. “But one day, they’re going to have to sit down with the Tibetans.”

[Watch a clip of Tutu from “Tibet’s Stolen Child.”](#)

Mourned by Tibetans

Tutu’s death on Sunday led to heartfelt condolences from Tibetan leaders, including the Dalai Lama, who [sent a letter to Tutu’s daughter, the Rev. Mpho Tutu](#).

“As you know, over the years, your father and I enjoyed an enduring friendship,” His Holiness wrote, adding, “The friendship and the spiritual bond between us was something we cherished.”

“With his passing away, we have lost a great man, who lived a truly meaningful life,” the Dalai Lama said. “He was devoted to the service of others, especially those who are least fortunate. I am convinced the best tribute we can pay him and keep his spirit alive is to do as he did and constantly look to see how we too can be of help to others.”

Penpa Tsering, president of the Central Tibetan Administration, which provides [democratic governance](#) for Tibetans in exile, wrote to Tutu’s wife, Leah Tutu. “On behalf of the Central Tibetan Administration and Tibetans around the world, I offer our deepest condolences and prayers to your family and the people of South Africa,” Penpa [wrote](#).

“The Tibetan people were among the millions who were the fortunate recipient of the Archbishop’s boundless empathy and support. His victory in bringing justice and freedom to his people is an inspiration to many, including the Tibetan people. We remain eternally grateful and inspired by his legacy.”

In another letter, Speaker Khenpo Sonam Tenphel of the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile [said](#): “I hope we will be able to follow [Tutu’s] guidance and words of compassion and humanity. We celebrate him and his legacy. He will live on in our hearts.”

The Central Tibetan Administration also held a mass prayer service for Tutu today, Dec. 27. CTA offices were closed following the service as a mark of condolence and respect for Tutu.



International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) | 1825 Jefferson Place NW | Washington, DC 20036 | United States of America
Phone: (202) 785-1515 | Fax: (202) 785-4343 | info@savetibet.org

ICT Europe
Funenpark 1D | 1018 AK
Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Phone: +31 (0)20 3308265
Fax: +31 (0)20 3308266
icteurope@savetibet.nl

ICT Deutschland e.V.
Schönhauser Allee 163 | 10435
Berlin, Germany
Phone: +49 (0)30 27879086
Fax: +49 (0)30 27879087
info@savetibet.de

ICT Brussels
11, rue de la linière | 1060
Brussels, Belgium
Phone: +32 (0)2 609 44 10
Fax: +32 (0)2 609 44 32
info@savetibet.eu