



## INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

### **Tibet special coordinator speaks to media on Olympics, transnational repression**

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In her first interviews as US special coordinator for Tibetan issues, Uzra Zeya said the US government's stance on the upcoming Beijing Winter Olympics can help shine a light on China's human rights abuses in Tibet.

In separate appearances on Radio Free Asia, TibetTV and Voice of America, Zeya also addressed the Biden-Harris administration's increasing efforts to combat China's "transnational repression" of Tibetan exile communities. She further discussed her work with Congress and other partners, and her desire to meet with the Dalai Lama.

Zeya, who serves concurrently as the undersecretary of state for civilian security, democracy and human rights, began her role as the special coordinator on Dec. 20, 2021. She is responsible for coordinating US 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 brutal occupation for over six decades.

During her interviews, Zeya spoke about China's restrictions on access to Tibet in the context of the Winter Olympics, which begin Feb. 4 in Beijing.

### **Access and the Olympics**

Zeya pointed out the US made a "principled decision" not to send any of its officials to the Games. Other countries, including Australia, Canada, Japan and the United Kingdom, have joined the US in this diplomatic boycott of the Olympics.

"I think that our decision with respect to the Olympics was also to show that we would not treat these Games as business as usual," Zeya said, "and that we would not be contributing to the fanfare of the Games in such a way that obscures the reality of human rights abuses occurring as we speak in the PRC.

"On the question of access," she added, "this is an absolute priority. We have a legislative mandate as well that we intend to uphold. I think there is an opportunity in our stance with respect to the Olympics to show our commitment to promoting human rights and to shine a light on the reality of the situation in Tibet and elsewhere."

In 2018, the US passed the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act, which takes aim at China's unfair policy of denying US diplomats, journalists and ordinary citizens access to Tibet while Chinese citizens can travel freely throughout the US.

Under the legislation, the US government has banned Chinese officials responsible for keeping Americans out of Tibet from entering the United States.

### **Transnational repression**

Zeya also spoke in her interviews about the Chinese government's attempts to intimidate Tibetan communities living in exile in the United States and across the world.

“The Biden-Harris administration is elevating our responses and our coordination with respect to transnational repression,” Zeya said. “This is the very concerning phenomenon of authoritarian governments, including the [People’s Republic of China], effectively exporting their repression and using coercion, technology, diplomacy to pressure diaspora actors and particularly those advocating for human rights.

“The transnational repression aspect is an important part of my mandate when we look at our support for Tibetan diaspora communities across the world, and it’s something that we’ll be engaging our international partners on as well.”

In 2020, the US Justice Department announced the arrest of Baimadajie Angwang, a New York City police officer accused of spying on local Tibetan Americans for the Chinese government. The case highlighted the repression Tibetan communities in the US continue to face from the Chinese regime.

## **Congress, the CTA and ICT**

Zeya said she has already begun engaging with members of Congress, several of who sent her letters before she even became special coordinator, laying out ways Congress and the administration can work together to advance US policy on Tibet.

“I’m so heartened by the very strong, bipartisan expression of support for President Biden and Secretary [of State Antony] Blinken’s decision to name me as the special coordinator,” Zeya said. “I think there is a long tradition of bipartisan, US congressional support for advancing the rights of the Tibetan people, which I intend to also integrate in my role as coordinator.”

Zeya also noted that she has already met with Namgyal Choedup, the representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Central Tibetan Administration to North America.

Zeya also met with the International Campaign for Tibet shortly after taking office.

## **Dalai Lama**

In her interviews, Zeya once again called on the Chinese government to resume direct dialogue with the Dalai Lama or his representatives to work toward meaningful autonomy for Tibetans.

Zeya said she will team with allies in the international community to try to restart the dialogue process.

“I am already engaging with other like-minded partners who we hope will work alongside us in seeking to advance the human rights of the Tibetan people and help preserve their unique cultural, religious, historical and linguistic traditions,” she said.

Zeya added that she hopes to meet with the Dalai Lama—who sent her a congratulatory letter upon her appointment—although COVID-related travel restrictions make that challenging.

“I certainly hope to have the opportunity to engage His Holiness the Dalai Lama directly,” Zeya said, “and once we have a confirmation we’ll be happy to share it publicly.”



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