



## INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

### **Tibetan Sikyong (President) builds crucial support during Washington visit**

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The Sikyong (President) of the Central Tibetan Administration visited Washington, DC last week, meeting with top US officials and influencers and building support for new initiatives on Tibet.

Penpa Tsering, who serves as the democratic leader of the Tibetan diaspora, had a full schedule in the US capital that included strategizing with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif.; calling on Senate Foreign Relations Committee Ranking Member Jim Risch, R-Idaho, House Foreign Affairs Committee Ranking Member Michael McCaul, R-Texas, and House Rules Committee Chair Jim McGovern, D-Mass.; sitting down with Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues Uzra Zeya; attending a luncheon with House Democracy Partnership members; visiting major DC think tanks; and engaging local Tibetan Americans and Chinese Americans.

The visit raised expectations for new US measures to support the Tibetan people over the coming months.

“The bi-partisan US commitment and global leadership in supporting the Tibet cause is a source of great hope for Tibetans in Tibet and outside and will always be remembered,” Penpa tweeted during his visit.

This was Penpa’s first trip to Washington since his election as Sikyong one year ago.

Below is a summary of Penpa’s activities in Washington from April 25-29, 2022.

#### **Monday, April 25**

After arriving at Dulles International Airport the night before and greeting the local Tibetan American community, Sikyong held important meetings at the US State Department.

He met with Undersecretary of State Uzra Zeya, who began serving as the Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues in December 2021.

As the Special Coordinator, Zeya acts 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.

Penpa also met with White House Indo-Pacific Coordinator Kurt Campbell and tweeted, “Was honoured to meet with US National Security Council Indo-Pacific Coordinator Kurt Campbell, who for many years has worked on and well understands the case of Tibet. I look forward to expanding our cooperation to address the challenges Tibetans and the world face today.”

The first full day of Penpa’s visit was also the 33rd birthday of the Panchen Lama, the high-ranking Tibetan Buddhist leader who has not been seen in public since the Chinese government abducted him and his parents in 1995 when he was only 6 years old.

On his birthday, the State Department called on Chinese authorities to “account for [the Panchen Lama] Gedhun Choekyi Nyima’s whereabouts and well-being immediately and to allow him to fully exercise his

human rights and fundamental freedoms.” This was met with a Chinese spokesperson’s reaction the next day claiming, “The so-called reincarnated spiritual child is just an ordinary Chinese citizen living a normal life. He and his family do not want their normal life to be disturbed by others.”

Penpa also met with Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Rashad Hussain. The meeting included Zeekgyab Rinpoche, abbot of Tashi Lhunpo Monastery, the traditional seat of the Panchen Lama. Zeekgyab Rinpoche took part in several of the Sikyong’s events throughout the week.

That evening, the Office of Tibet, along with the Capital Area Tibetan Association and International Campaign for Tibet, hosted a reception for the Panchen Lama’s birthday that included remarks from Penpa, Zeekgyab Rinpoche, Hussain, US Commission on International Religious Freedom Vice Chair Nury Turkel, former Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, former Ambassador Kelley Currie, State Department official Scott Busby and others.

## **Tuesday, April 26**

On Tuesday, Sikyong had several other meetings at the State Department. He also called on several major civil society groups in Washington.

Penpa and Zeekgyab Rinpoche visited Freedom House, which recently declared Tibet the least-free country on Earth in a tie with South Sudan and Syria.

Afterward, Penpa met with scholars at the Brookings Institution. Later in the day, he joined the National Endowment for Democracy for a discussion about Tibetan democracy.

Sikyong also met with Czech Foreign Minister Jan Lipavský, who tweeted that, like Tibet, his country “experienced what it was like to live under the influence of a superpower and to be deprived of human rights.”

Lipavský’s message predictably sparked an outraged response from the Chinese government, which has illegally occupied Tibet for over 60 years and deprives the Tibetan people of their most basic freedoms.

## **Wednesday, April 27**

Sikyong went to Capitol Hill on Wednesday for meetings with Congressional leaders.

He and Zeekgyab Rinpoche met with Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass., a longtime friend of Tibet and Co-Chair of both the Congressional-Executive Commission on China and the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission.

For lunch, Zeekgyab Rinpoche visited the International Campaign for Tibet, an advocacy group that promotes human rights and democratic freedoms for the Tibetan people.

Rinpoche helped ICT celebrate several employees who have been with the organization for 10 years or longer.

Meanwhile, Sikyong continued meeting with State Department officials, as well as US Senate staff.

## **Thursday, April 28**

Thursday was a full day of meetings for Sikyong with Congressional leaders. Richard Gere, the Chairman of the International Campaign for Tibet, joined Penpa on Capitol Hill.

Their meetings included Risch, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Ranking Member, and Rep. Michael McCaul, R-Texas.

The House Democracy Partnership hosted a luncheon for Penpa that was attended by Reps. Diana DeGette, D-Colo.; Chrissy Houlahan, D-Pa.; Andy Kim, D-N.J., David Cicilline, D-R.I., and French Hill, R-Ark.

One of the highlights of the day was the meeting hosted by Pelosi, who has been a dedicated supporter of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan people for decades.

In addition to the House Speaker, Penpa and Gere, other participants included McGovern and Rep. Barbara Lee, D-Calif.

Gere told Radio Free Asia: “We are trying to burst the myths or narratives that the Chinese government has been presenting for many decades about Tibet being a part of China, which is not true.

“And we are trying to push for a genuine dialogue [between China] and His Holiness the Dalai Lama,” Gere added.

That evening, Penpa held a briefing with Washington journalists. Both the Press Trust of India and Asian News International published stories afterward, while Politico published an article about Penpa’s visit earlier in the week.

## **Friday, April 29**

Penpa wrapped up his week in Washington with more meetings on Capitol Hill.

Afterward, he participated in a Colloquium on Thirty Years of Tibet-China Dialogue Engagement at George Washington University.

Finally, Sikyong met with the local Tibetan American community that evening.

Sikyong then departed for further stops on his North American trip, including Philadelphia and New York.



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