



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Looking ahead—and back—to the year in Tibet advocacy

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As 2023 gets underway, momentum is rising for efforts to resolve China's illegal, decades-long occupation of Tibet.

This year, members of the US Congress are expected to push for support of the Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Conflict Act, a bill that will pressure the government of China to resume dialogue with the envoys of the Dalai Lama toward a negotiated agreement on Tibet's future.

There will also be continued US funding for Tibet programs, along with further efforts to build support for Tibet in Europe, at the United Nations and around the globe.

But to understand where the Tibet movement is going, it's necessary to look back. 2022 was an eventful year, and while many developments inside Chinese-occupied Tibet were grave, there was also a renewed focus on the Tibetan people from governments, activists and leaders across the globe.

“What we saw last year is that resolving the Tibetan issue remains a priority for the international community,” said Bhuchung K. Tsering, Interim President of the International Campaign for Tibet. “Progress was made on core issues, including access to Tibet, religious freedom and the succession of the Dalai Lama, and Tibet's climate crisis. That is due to the deep, active commitment of elected leaders and government officials around the world. But it is also due to the ceaseless advocacy of Tibet supporters, who have inspired all of us with their dedication to the just cause of the Tibetan people.

“As 2023 begins, ICT looks forward to working with all supporters of Tibet to keep the spotlight on the Tibetan issue and to move closer to our goal of encouraging a resolution to the Tibet-China conflict through negotiations between the Chinese government and envoys of the Dalai Lama.”

22 things that happened in 2022 (plus one extra for 2023!)

To mark the passage of one year to the next, here is a list of 22 important events that happened in 2022, plus one extra for the start of 2023.

1. Religious freedom violations

Last year began with the dismaying news that Chinese authorities had demolished a 99-foot-tall Buddha statue in Drango, along with another large Buddha statue and 45 prayer wheels, beginning in December 2021. Further religious freedom violations followed in 2022, including financial measures that tightened control of Tibetan monasteries; and a ban on Tibetan Buddhist teachers in Guangdong's Yunfu City.

2. Beijing Olympics 2022

The 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics began Feb. 4 amid atrocity crimes by the Chinese government and a diplomatic boycott by countries around the globe. ICT published an open letter to NBC, the US broadcaster of the Games, demanding it give equal time to the victims of China's oppression. ICT also supported an awareness-raising trip through Europe by Dhondup Wangchen, who was imprisoned after the 2008 Beijing Olympics for making a documentary about China's abuses in Tibet.

3. Tibet ranked least free on Earth

In February, the watchdog group Freedom House released global freedom scores showing that Tibet ranked as the least-free country or territory on Earth. Tibet shared that ignominious position with South Sudan and Syria. It was the second year in a row that Tibet ranked as the world's least free.

4. Chinese interrupt Tibet speaker at UN

At the UN Human Rights Council on March 8, ICT's Vincent Metten (on behalf of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights) called for access to Tibet and voiced concern about the Council's silence. His statement was interrupted by the Chinese delegation complaining that he was "attacking the Communist Party" and "violating relevant rules and regulations." The intervention was unsuccessful, as the chairing vice-president asked for the statement to continue.

5. Two more self-immolations

In the first weekend of March, popular 25-year-old Tibetan singer Tsewang Norbu died after reportedly self-immolating days earlier near the Potala Palace in Lhasa. Later that month, an 81-year-old Tibetan named Taphun died after setting fire to himself in front of a police station outside Kirti Monastery in Ngaba. They were the 158th and 159th Tibetans, respectively, to self-immolate in Tibet and China since 2009.

6. "Never Forget Tibet" premieres

After escaping Chinese-occupied Tibet, the Dalai Lama reached safety in India on March 31, 1959. Sixty-three years later, the film "Never Forget Tibet: The Dalai Lama's Untold Story" premiered at 800 theaters across the United States and Canada. The feature-length documentary showed that even after more than six decades of exile, the Dalai Lama continues to inspire and attract support.

7. Dialogue for Our Future

In April, the Dialogue for Our Future shined a spotlight on Tibet's climate crisis and brought together the Dalai Lama and experts in climate and systems change. Unfortunately, inside Tibet, the Chinese government pursued a policy of forcibly relocating more than 17,000 Tibetans as part of an ongoing policy of forced resettlement that threatens Tibet's environment. ICT also published a report called "Environmental Defenders of Tibet: China's persecution of Tibetan environmental defenders."

8. Sikyong visit to Washington

A special dignitary visited the US capital in the last week of April: Penpa Tsering, the Sikyong (President) of the Central Tibetan Administration. As the democratically elected leader of Tibetan exiles around the globe, Penpa had a full itinerary. He met with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi; Representatives and Senators from both parties; Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues Uzra Zeya; major DC think tanks; and local Tibetan Americans and Chinese Americans.

9. Access to Tibet

Following a summit in Germany, the Group of Seven's Foreign Ministers issued a communique on May 14 insisting that Chinese authorities "allow immediate, meaningful and unfettered access to Xinjiang and Tibet for independent observers." Forty-two UN experts later echoed the G7's call for access. According to a US State Department report earlier in the year, China "systematically impeded" travel to Tibetan areas by US diplomats, journalists and tourists in 2021.

10. Special Coordinator visits Dharamsala

Uzra Zeya, the Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy and Human Rights, became the US Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues in December 2021. Five months later, she visited Dharamsala, India, meeting with the Dalai Lama and Tibetan leadership, experiencing Tibetan culture and sharing a message of US support for the Tibetan people. Zeya also met with Tibetan refugees in Nepal a few days later.

11. UN High Commissioner visits China

Zeya's visit to Dharamsala stood in stark contrast to UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet's trip to China. Not only did Bachelet not visit Tibet—and only marginally refer to the situation

there—she later gave China’s Communist regime a political victory by adopting its framing of policies at a controversial press conference on May 28. A few weeks later, Bachelet announced she would step down.

12. Wang Yang visits Tibet

Wang Yang, one of seven Politburo standing committee members and chairperson of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, visited Tibetan areas incorporated into Gansu province from May 25-28. State media framed the visit in terms of national security, as opposed to the framing of development and stability used during a 2018 trip by Wang. The shift was consistent with political developments in China in recent years.

13. Writers, intellectuals, activists imprisoned

The already outrageous number of political prisoners in Tibet grew larger with the detentions of six Tibetans, among them writers and intellectuals, for such crimes as expressing their thoughts and opinions. China’s authorities also later sentenced six Tibetan writers and former political prisoners to prison terms of four to 14 years. In addition, Jigme Gyatso, a prominent former political prisoner, died July 2 after years in prison left him unrecoverably ill.

14. 8th World Parliamentarians’ Convention on Tibet

Parliamentarians from 28 countries attended the 8th World Parliamentarians’ Convention on Tibet in Washington from June 22-23 convened by the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile. The participants committed to ensuring collaboration among parliaments and with the Tibetan Parliament. In the Convention Declaration, they expressed continued support for Tibetans’ democratic achievements, commitment to nonviolence and efforts to resolve the conflict with China through the Middle Way Approach.

15. Resolve Tibet Act introduced in House

During the Parliamentarians’ Convention, Rep. Jim McGovern—alongside Speaker Pelosi—teased the introduction of a bill that would challenge China’s propaganda on Tibet and push for a peaceful resolution of the Tibetan issue. On July 13, McGovern joined Rep. Michael McCaul to introduce the bipartisan Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Conflict Act. The bill will pressure China to resume negotiations with the Dalai Lama’s envoys toward an agreement on Tibet’s status.

16. Richard Gere interview on Indian TV

In India for the Dalai Lama’s 87th birthday, ICT Board Chair Richard Gere spoke to Indian TV channel NDTV. Gere shared his thoughts on the Dalai Lama, Tibet, China, the United States and the international community’s approach to China. He noted that His Holiness has “only spoken about peace and non-violence, and dialogue, everything should be resolved through dialogue.”

17. Tibet Lobby Day returns in person

2022 saw Tibet Lobby Day return in person to Washington, DC for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Over 100 Tibetan Americans and Tibet supporters traveled to the US Capitol for more than 80 meetings with members of Congress and Congressional staff. Their primary request? For their Senators and Representatives to support the Resolve Tibet Act.

18. COVID in Tibet

After Chinese tourists allegedly sparked a COVID-19 outbreak in Tibetan cities, the Chinese government’s inhumane restrictions and mismanagement worsened community spread of the virus and accelerated already rising cost-of-living expenses. The situation got so bad that at least five Tibetans in and around Lhasa committed suicide in late September by jumping off mass quarantine sites or locked-down residential buildings. Lhasa authorities issued a rare public apology on Sept. 17 but largely silenced Tibetans’ expressions of outrage. By the end of the year, new mayors were appointed in Lhasa and two other cities hard-hit by COVID.

19. 20th Party Congress

The 20th Party Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, held Oct. 16-22, laid out priorities for the next five years and saw Xi Jinping begin an unprecedented third term with an indefinite tenure and firm grip on power.

The Congress signaled that the pace of indoctrination and assimilation of Tibetans will rise to an unseen level. Several officials were also appointed to leadership roles that will affect Tibet.

20. Adrian Zenz receives ICT Snow Lion prize

ICT awarded its first Snow Lion human rights prize, worth 3,000 euros, to anthropologist and China researcher Adrian Zenz and to the Tibet Film Festival. The award ceremony on Oct. 15 at the Berlin Environmental Forum featured Sikyong Penpa Tsering. The prize was initially created by ICT Germany to honor journalists for reporting on Tibet but transformed into a human rights prize in 2022.

21. Tibetan Parliamentarians tour Europe

Three members of the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile toured Europe Nov. 13-Dec. 1 to raise awareness and build support for the Tibetan vision of a democratic society in the heart of Asia. The tour took the Parliamentarians—Youdon Aukatsang, Venerable Tenpa Yarphel and Wangdue Dorjee—to the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Sweden and the Netherlands. Earlier, three Tibet groups in the Netherlands sent a letter to the Prime Minister about reports of Chinese police stations in the country, as well as official Chinese intimidation of Dutch citizens of Tibetan heritage and others.

22. US sanctions Chinese officials

Coinciding with Human Rights Day on Dec. 10, the US Treasury Department instituted sanctions on former Tibet Autonomous Region Party Secretary Wu Yingjie and former TAR Public Security Bureau Director Zhang Hongbo. Both were accused of “serious human rights abuse” of the Tibetan people. The sanctions built pressure on China to resolve its longstanding conflict in Tibet.

23. Resolve Tibet Act introduced in Senate

2022 ended on a high note as Sens. Jeff Merkley, Todd Young and Patrick Leahy introduced the Resolve Tibet Act in the Senate on Dec. 20. Days later, President Biden signed a funding bill that allocated over \$20 million for Tibet-related programs in fiscal year 2023.

As the new year begins, ICT and Tibet supporters will push to advance the Resolve Tibet Act through Congress and to deepen support for Tibet around the globe.



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@save-tibet.eu