



## INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

### **Richard Gere speaks with Tibet bill sponsors, McCarthy and Jeffries** Over 160 Tibetan Americans & supporters join in Tibet Lobby Day

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On an exciting and impactful day for Tibetans at the US Capitol, International Campaign for Tibet Chairman Richard Gere spoke March 28 with the Republican and Democratic leaders of the House, the former Speaker, and the main sponsors of a new bipartisan, bicameral bill on Tibet.

Gere's trip to the Hill was part of events surrounding Tibet Lobby Day, which saw over 160 Tibetan Americans and Tibet supporters meeting congressional members and staff to call for support to the Resolve Tibet Act.

The Act was also the focus at a Congressional-Executive Commission on China hearing on March 28 morning where Gere testified alongside the Sikyong (President) and two other Tibet activists. The hearing was on "Preserving Tibet: Cultural Erasure, Forced Assimilation and Transnational Repression" and US Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues, Uzra Zeya, also spoke at the hearing in her capacity as a member of CECC.

Joined by Representative Namgyal Choedup from the Office of Tibet in Washington and ICT staff, Gere met with House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., and Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y.

Gere also visited Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., a longtime champion of the Tibetan people.

In the afternoon, he spoke at a press conference outside the Capitol with Rep. Michael McCaul, R-Texas, Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass., Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., and Sen. Todd Young, R-Ind., the main sponsors of the Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Conflict Act.

Also known as the Resolve Tibet Act, the bill will pressure China's government to resolve its decades-long occupation of Tibet through peaceful dialogue with the Dalai Lama's envoys.

"I see this as a moment of possibility," Gere said at the press conference. "And I want us all to grab this now.

"This bill that we've been talking about is a part of that. And it's setting the record straight. It's setting history straight. It's setting our own motivation and making it as pure as it possibly can be that we are there for the Tibetan people."

### **Markup of bill promised**

McCaul, who is Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said during the press conference that a markup of the Resolve Tibet Act is coming soon. "I promised Richard Gere we would mark it up out of my committee and get it to the House floor as soon as possible," he said.

A markup is an important step on the way to a bill passing the House. It allows committee members to discuss, debate and make changes to the legislation.

McGovern welcomed the news of the markup. “It is time to say that human rights matter, that the Chinese government cannot rewrite Tibetan history, that the Chinese government needs to restart a formal dialogue with Tibetans,” McGovern said. “And finally it is time to say that America is not going to stand idly by while Chinese disinformation on Tibet runs rampant.”

The Resolve Tibet Act will push back on the Chinese government’s false claim that Tibet has been part of China throughout history, and it will recognize that Tibet’s legal status is yet to be determined under international law.

The bill will support Tibetans’ right to self-determination and pressure China’s government to get back to the negotiating table with the Dalai Lama’s representatives for the first time since 2010.

“With no change in the status quo, it’s no surprise that China has stalled talks with Tibet for more than a decade,” Young said. “Abetted by an international community unwilling to push back, the Chinese Communist Party has claimed Tibet is an internal matter. But we need to realize that this is an unresolved conflict, not an internal affair.”

“We have to pass the Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Conflict Act and pass it now ...” Merkley added. “The people of Tibet need and deserve the right to determine their own future. Let’s be stronger together and make that happen.”

In addition to the four main sponsors of the bill, Reps. Mike Lawler, R-N.Y., and Nicole Malliotakis, R-N.Y., also were present at the press conference.

## **‘Preserving Tibet’ hearing**

At the CECC hearing, Rep. Chris Smith, R-N.J., the Commission’s Chair, opened with a statement calling the Resolve Tibet Act an “excellent bill.” “The sooner it’s on the floor for passage, the better,” Smith said.

Merkley, the Commission’s Co-Chair, added that, “I really hope we can see [the Resolve Tibet Act] expedited.”

Under Secretary of State Uzra Zeya, the US Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues, addressed the hearing by video, calling out the Chinese government’s efforts to eliminate Tibetans’ distinct cultural, religious and linguistic identity.

“This administration,” Zeya said, “will continue to shine a light on Tibet-related issues within our broader human rights concerns with the PRC [People’s Republic of China] bilaterally and jointly with multilateral partners and promote accountability for the PRC’s human rights abuses in Tibet and elsewhere.”

## **Continuity of culture**

Penpa Tsering, the Sikyong (President) of the Central Tibetan Administration, which provides democratic governance for Tibetans in exile, testified at the hearing virtually.

Penpa warned that if the PRC “is not made to reverse or change its current policies, Tibet and Tibetans will definitely die a slow death.”

However, Penpa added: “The absence of traction on dialogue since 2010 sounds ominous, but we remain positive about finding a peaceful solution that avoids extreme polarities.”

The other witnesses at the hearing were Lhadon Tethong and Tenzin Dorjee, the Director and Senior Researcher and Strategist of Tibet Action Institute.

During his remarks, Gere spoke about a wide range of issues that Tibet faces under China's occupation.

The ICT Chairman also talked about the uniqueness of the Tibetan people—and the tragedy of China rupturing Tibet's ancient culture of wisdom.

"These people are unique," Gere said. "They're unique on the planet. They're unique in our present society. They have so much to offer us, not just Americans but the entire planet, of how we can proceed.

"This breaking of that continuity of love and compassion and wisdom is probably the saddest thing that we've seen. I don't care about the money. I don't even care about the natural resources. I care about this continuity of love and compassion."

## **Tibet Lobby Day**

Gere's visit to Washington came during Tibet Lobby Day, an annual event coordinated by ICT that brings Tibetan Americans and Tibet supporters to the US capital to meet with their Senators, Representatives and Congressional staff.

Now in its 15th year, the event had a record turnout of more than 160 participants from across the United States.

The participants asked their members of Congress to support the Resolve Tibet Act. Their efforts had an immediate impact, with the legislation officially gaining several new co-sponsors after Lobby Day.

Other priorities at Tibet Lobby Day included maintaining US funding that benefits the Tibetan people, pressing for the full implementation of the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act and the Tibetan Policy and Support Act, and calling for the release of Tibetan political prisoners.



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