



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Tibetan New Year brings celebrations, bill passage

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The Tibetan New Year got off to an exciting start as Tibetans and world leaders celebrated around the globe and the US Congress advanced a bill to help peacefully resolve China's occupation of Tibet.

"Losar," the Tibetan New Year, arrived on Feb. 10, 2024. It marked the start of the Year of the Wood Dragon 2151 in Tibetans' lunar calendar.

To welcome the new year, the [Dalai Lama shared a video message](#) for Tibetans inside Tibet and in exile, while the Tibetan sikyong (president) and other political leaders offered Losar greetings, too.

In the United States, the State Department hosted a Losar celebration on Feb. 13 for Tibetan Americans and US officials. The event featured a video greeting from Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken, remarks by [Under Secretary Uzra Zeya](#) and Deputy Secretary Richard R. Verma, participation by Deputy Secretary of State Kurt M. Campbell, performances by Tibetan musicians and dancers, and a speech by the Dalai Lama's Representative to North America Namgyal Choedup.

As the celebration was taking place at the State Department, on Capitol Hill, members of Congress were [speaking on the House floor in support of the Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Dispute Act](#), a bipartisan bill that will push China's government to resolve its decades-long occupation of Tibet through peaceful dialogue with Tibetan leaders.

Known as the Resolve Tibet Act, [the bill passed the House](#) today, Feb. 15. Supporters will now work to [pass it in the Senate](#) and make it the law of the United States.

Dalai Lama's message

The Resolve Tibet Act provides support for the [Dalai Lama's "Middle Way Approach,"](#) which would resolve the dispute by leaving Tibet as part of China in exchange for meaningful autonomy for the Tibetan people.

The Chinese government has brutally occupied Tibet for 65 years since forcing the Dalai Lama to flee into exile. Today, [Tibet is the least-free country on Earth](#) alongside South Sudan and Syria, according to the watchdog group Freedom House.

In his Losar video, the Dalai Lama said the Tibetan people's belief has remained strong in the face of China's oppression.

"Despite undergoing great difficulties in exile and living under a powerful Communist Chinese regime, the faith and aspiration of our people, the majority of whom are inside Tibet, have remained undiminished while I have been the leader," said His Holiness, who was enthroned as Dalai Lama in 1940. "Although the Communist Chinese rulers ... have wished that we Tibetans forget our religious faith, we have held onto our convictions and our culture even more firmly—this is very good."

[Watch the Dalai Lama's Losar video.](#)

Tibetan political leaders

China's crackdown on Tibet continued this Losar, with Chinese authorities reportedly visiting at least 35 Tibetan Buddhist monasteries prior to the holiday and [urging high-ranking monks to "deeply expose and denounce" the Dalai Lama.](#)

In his Losar message, the [Tibetan Sikyong \(President\) Penpa Tsering](#) said: "The Tibetan struggle for freedom has endured in the world to this day primarily because of the benevolence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and, most importantly, because of the unyielding courage of Tibetans in Tibet. Thus, as we celebrate this Losar, it is imperative to make a firm determination that we will not, under any circumstances, give up on maintaining our unique identity."

Other Tibetan leaders shared Losar greetings too, including [Speaker of the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile Khenpo Sonam Tenphel](#) and [Justice Commissioner Tenzin Lungtok](#).

The Central Tibetan Administration, which provides democratic governance for Tibetans in exile, also held a [Losar celebration in Dharamsala, India, the capital of the Tibetan exile community.](#)

US support for Tibet

At the State Department, Secretary Blinken addressed the crowd of over 70 Tibetan Americans, Tibet supporters and US officials via video message.

"We're proud to host so many Tibetan friends and partners at the State Department on this special day," Blinken said, "members of an extraordinarily vibrant and resilient Tibetan community around the world."

Blinken added that through the leadership of Under Secretary Zeya, the US is "deepening international support for Tibet—from addressing humanitarian needs to protecting the environment on the Tibetan Plateau."

[Watch Secretary Blinken's Losar greeting.](#)

During her remarks, Zeya, who serves as the US special coordinator for Tibetan issues, spoke about recent achievements in global advocacy for Tibet, including at China's Universal Periodic Review at the UN Human Rights Council in January, where an [unprecedented number of countries raised Tibet](#), as well as at the [5th International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance Ministerial Conference](#) in Prague in November and the [World Water Week Conference](#) in Stockholm in August.

"According to Tibetan custom, the Wood Dragon symbolizes strength, energy, and fortitude," Zeya said, "and I can think of no better words than these to describe our global partnership among governments, advocacy organizations, and supporters near and far."

State Department event

Deputy Secretary Verma also addressed the crowd, saying his previous role as US ambassador to India and his work on the US-India relationship led him to "appreciate just how close Americans and Tibetans have been for generations."

"Losar is an opportunity to reflect on the things we are grateful for," Verma said. "For me it is important to express gratitude for the deep affinity between Americans and Tibetans that will continue to draw us to each other."

Namgyal Choedup, the representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Central Tibetan Administration to North America, said: “As we celebrate Losar around the world, the Tibetan people are recommitting themselves to the path of nonviolence and regenerating the Tibetan movement based on a sense of truth and justice, and the goal of a future world that is based on mutual respect, equality and dignity.”

Several other US officials attended the event, including Campbell, one of the highest-ranking officials at the State Department. Campbell [tweeted](#) afterward that he was delighted to join the event, saying: “In my new role, I look forward to engaging diaspora communities, civil society, and governments to ensure a connected, prosperous, secure, & resilient region.”

Student speakers

In addition to the speeches, the event featured Tibetan song and dance performances, traditional Tibetan food and other festivities.

The Office of Tibet in Washington, DC, the Capital Area Tibetan Association and the International Campaign for Tibet helped the State Department organize the event.

One of the highlights of the event came when two Tibetan American students took to the mic to address the crowd.

Ninth-grader Pema McAlister spoke about Losar customs, including preparing the Losar shrine and going to a temple. “These are my traditions that I hold dear, as they remind me of my roots,” she said: “Losar’s impact extends to Tibetan diaspora communities worldwide. It stands as a testament to the resilience and strength of the Tibetan people who, despite facing numerous challenges, proudly uphold their cultural heritage.”

Fellow ninth-grader Tenzin Kunsal Womatsang said: “Together let us continue to amplify our voices, raise awareness and advocate for the fundamental human rights of all Tibetans. Let us strive for a future where every Tibetan regardless of location can celebrate Losar freely and proudly, safeguarding our current legacy for generations to come.”

She then added a traditional Tibetan New Year greeting: “Losar Tashi Delek!”

[See photos from the State Department Losar celebration.](#)

Standing up to China

While Losar was a time to celebrate for Tibetan Americans around the country, the holiday also served as a reminder of China’s “transnational repression” against the Tibetan people outside their occupied homeland.

When the mayor of Belleville township in New Jersey—population of about 40,000—accepted a resident’s request to raise the Tibetan flag, the Chinese embassy in New York sent him a letter urging that he reconsider.

“I was kind of taken aback by their request,” Mayor Michael Melham told [Radio Free Asia](#), “especially the fact that they mentioned that the [Tibetan] flag is a symbol that China doesn’t accept.

“I was really taken aback by that,” Melham continued, “and the fact that the Chinese government being housed in New York is going to try to muscle in on a New Jersey municipality and try and influence their mayor or their governing body or their township as a whole as to what they can or cannot do.”

Despite the Chinese embassy's pressure, Melham raised the Tibetan flag outside Belleville's Town Hall on Feb. 9, the eve of Losar, as part of the township's ongoing program to celebrate local diversity.

"Here in Belleville, we're proud of our culture and our history, and I know Tibetan people are, too," Melham said, according to Radio Free Asia.

"But increasingly, their language, spirituality or their religion is trying to be silenced in China. That's something that we can't accept ... We want to make sure that history will always tell their story ... so, the best way to do it is to do things like this where we stand up and stand firm."



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