



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

ICT joins Dalai Lama's birthday celebrations on Capitol Hill as calls grow for his right to return to Tibet

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The Dalai Lama turned 83 this month, and last week, the International Campaign for Tibet joined the celebration of his birthday with leaders from the US Congress and the Tibetan government-in-exile.

On July 11, the Office of Tibet—which represents the Dalai Lama and the Central Tibetan Administration in North America—hosted a reception for the Dalai Lama's birthday that featured remarks from Reps. Jim McGovern (D-Mass.), Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), and Claudia Tenney (R-NY).

The bipartisan group of congresspeople praised the Dalai Lama's message of compassion and voiced support for his peaceful struggle on behalf of [the Tibetan people, who are facing increasing repression at the hands of the Chinese government.](#)

Tenney also discussed her plans to recruit young Tibetan-Americans for her staff as part of the [Washington Internship Program for Tibetan Americans, which ICT announced this year on the Dalai Lama's birthday.](#)

Dalai Lama and his right to return to Tibet

The Dalai Lama, who is the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhists, fled Tibet in 1959 after the independent Central Asian country was invaded by communist China. Since then, he has won the Nobel Peace Prize and become one of the world's most revered champions of tolerance and nonviolence.

However, despite merely seeking genuine autonomy for the Tibetan people, rather than full independence, the Chinese authorities have not considered allowing the Dalai Lama to return to Tibet.

In a powerful op-ed last week in *The Boston Globe*, McGovern and Pelosi said it is time for the Dalai Lama to be given access to his native land.

“We urge our fellow Americans to join in calling on Chinese leaders to let the Dalai Lama go home,” the representatives wrote.

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Support given from American, Tibetan and Chinese leaders

The celebration of the Dalai Lama's birthday, which took place in the Capitol Visitor Center on Capitol Hill, was graced by the 17th Karmapa, a prominent Tibetan Buddhist master, who said, "This occasion is so joyful that it is hard to put feelings into words. Yet further, it is a time to reflect on the situation of the Tibetans in Tibet, who are not allowed to express their feelings about His Holiness and who are suffering great difficulties. Therefore, it is also a day for us Tibetans outside Tibet to dedicate ourselves even more to fulfilling His Holiness' wishes and to supporting his compassionate vision."

Arjia Rinpoche, the former abbot of Kumbum Monastery in Tibet and current head of the Tibetan Mongolian Buddhist Cultural Center in Indiana, led the gathering in a prayer. Earlier in the day, he spoke at a [conference that ICT co-hosted on religious freedom and foreign policy](#).

Additional remarks at the ceremony were made by Tenzin Dorjee, the recently elected chair of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, Carl Gershman, president of the National Endowment for Democracy, and Chen Guangcheng, a Chinese civil rights activist.

More action needed

Matteo Mecacci, ICT's president, said during the event that even though the Dalai Lama has become a beloved figure worldwide, his supporters cannot get complacent.

Mecacci called on the US government to continue its historic support of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan people. Current steps that can be taken include [passing the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act](#) and [appointing a Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues, as US law requires](#).

"Unless the US government speaks clearly," Mecacci said, "other governments like China will not listen."