



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Congressional Leaders, former US president and fellow activists remember late ICT chairman at Capitol Hill event

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The sun was radiant, and it was surrounded by a glowing ring.

That breathtaking image was blown up and put on an easel at a service on Capitol Hill on March 12, 2019 where Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.)—alongside fellow friends, colleagues and family members of Lodi Gyaltzen Gyari—paid tribute to the remarkable Tibetan leader who helped the Dalai Lama make his people’s struggle for justice and human rights a major priority for the United States and governments around the world.

Lodi Gyari, the retired special envoy of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, senior official of the Central Tibetan Administration and executive chairman of the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT), passed away in San Francisco on Oct. 29, 2018.

A few hours later, that beautiful sun was seen outside the hospital where he died.

“It’s hard to know what to make of it,” Feinstein said, “except to say I regard it as a special tribute from the holy to Lodi Gyari.”

Words of praise

The service in the Capitol Visitor Center was attended by Lodi Gyari’s beloved wife, Dawa Chokyi Gyari, his daughter Tenzing Tsering Gyari, brother Dorjee Gyari, and other members of the family.

Leaders of politics and activism spoke at the event, including Feinstein, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), ICT Chairman Richard Gere, and former Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues Paula Dobriansky—who shared a written message for Gyari’s widow from former President George W. Bush.

“As president, I appreciated Lodi’s sound advice in his capacity as special envoy [of] His Holiness the Dalai Lama,” said Bush, as conveyed by Dobriansky. “I valued the creative ideas and policy recommendations...that he presented to my administration.”

Lodi Gyari, who came to Washington, DC in the early 1990s, made profound political, economic and social contributions to the Tibetan cause throughout his life.

Building on the Dalai Lama’s visits to the US, Gyari helped institutionalize support for Tibet in the US government—particularly through the Tibetan Policy Act of 2002, which specifies US policy and material support for the Tibetan people. Gere described the legislation as “an extraordinary achievement.”

Lodi Gyari “was, as we all know, a master diplomat and political strategist,” said Carl Gershman, president of the National Endowment for Democracy and a long time friend

“Whatever the ups and downs of the movement, he always had a vision and a plan,” said John Ackerly, a former ICT president and current board member. “His strategies didn’t always succeed, but he never was afraid to aim high, and he encouraged us all to do the same.”

Skillful and sweet

“The sustainability in Tibet of the Tibetan culture, religion and identity continues to be a core element of US Tibet policy, expressed as human rights monitoring, US development assistance and, most recently, in the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act,” Dobriansky said.

At the same time, those at the service on Capitol Hill remembered Gyari—who had been identified as a reincarnated monk—for his “unwavering grace, humility and courage,” as Pelosi put it.

“He was a religious leader and a diplomat,” she said, “an administrator and an activist. But I think for every one of us in this room, he was a teacher.”

Richard Gere, who first met Gyari in India nearly 40 years ago, said his longtime friend was extraordinary because he took the time to truly know others.

“Besides just being brilliant, he was a mensch,” Richard Gere said. “He was skillful, and he was sweet, and he was kind, and he cared deeply about everyone, even the Chinese.”

Richard Blum, Feinstein’s husband, recalled how Gyari and his wife would often come over to their home on Sundays.

Blum even gave away two of Lodi Gyari’s daughters in marriage, and Lodi Gyari officiated Blum’s daughter’s wedding.

“He really was a member of our family,” Blum said.

Continuing legacy

The service for Gyari came during the same week that Tibetans marked the 60th anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising against Chinese rule, which eventually led to the Dalai Lama fleeing Tibet’s capital of Lhasa on the night of March 17, 1959.

Finding a peaceful resolution to the Tibetan crisis “has been Lodi’s mission for his entire life,” said ICT President Matteo Mecacci. “ICT has been and continues to be privileged to support this mission.”

“Now,” said Pelosi, “Lodi’s legacy is ours to continue through action and advocacy.”