

Give Tibet a sporting chance

“We are convinced that the Games will improve human rights in China... If human rights are not acted upon to our satisfaction, then we will act.”

**Jacques Rogge,
President
International
Olympic
Committee
April 2002**



A Canada Tibet Committee briefing for journalists attending the Beijing Olympics

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www.tibet.ca

Why were there so many rallies against the Beijing Olympics?

There have been a number of Olympic related demonstrations in support of Tibet, most notably surrounding the Torch Relay.

These rallies were never against the Chinese people nor were they against athletes or fans. They were intended to highlight human rights abuses in Tibet and to prevent the Chinese government from hijacking the Olympic spirit to cover-up their tragic record.

Tibetans cannot protest in their own country without risking their lives and liberty. Free citizens have a duty to speak-up for Tibet.

With the media spotlight on China in the run-up to the Beijing Olympics, Tibetans and those who support them have a rare opportunity to raise awareness of the tragedy in Tibet.

What's the problem in Tibet?

Tibet was a sovereign country the size of Western Europe when it was invaded by the Chinese People's Liberation Army in 1950. At least a million Tibetans have died as a direct result of the invasion, its aftermath and occupation of their country. Many more have been tortured and imprisoned.

Although the histories of these two neighbouring countries have always been closely linked, it is not true – as the government of China claims – that Tibet has always been part of the Chinese 'motherland'. Tibetans have their own language, alphabet, religion and culture.

In fact, in a 1950 Canadian External Affairs memo, Canada set forth the following legal opinion:

"The question is, should Canada consider Tibet to be an independent state, a vassal of China, or an integral portion of China. It is submitted that the Chinese claim to sovereignty over Tibet is not well founded. Chinese suzerainty, perhaps existent, though ill-defined, before 1911, appears since then, on the basis of facts available to us, to have been a mere fiction. In fact, it appears that during the past 40 years Tibet has controlled its own internal and external affairs. Viewing the situation thus, I am of the opinion that Tibet is, from the point of view of international law, qualified for recognition as an independent state."

Today, every aspect of Tibetan culture is under assault by the ruling Chinese authorities. Basic human rights that Canadians take for granted are denied to Tibetans, who have no freedom of speech and are denied the freedom to practise their religion. For example, owning a photograph of the Dalai Lama or calling for his return to Tibet can lead to arrest, torture and lengthy imprisonment.

Tibetans are distinct in every way from their Chinese neighbours. And they want their culture to survive. Tibetans have very real fears for the future of their unique identity.

If it's been going on for so long, why the fuss now?

Beginning on the March 10th anniversary of the failed 1959 Tibetan uprising and knowing the eyes of the world were on China in the run-up to the Olympics, Tibetans in all regions of historic Tibet were emboldened to make a desperate plea to the world.

The response of the Chinese government was to throw all journalists and other foreigners out of Tibet and bring in tens of thousands of additional troops to quash the protests.

Despite the blackout, Tibetans are managing to get information to the outside world.

They describe:

- more than 200 people killed, many by police and military shooting point blank at unarmed protesters,

- thousands of arbitrary arrests and the torture of men, women and children,
- increased pace of 'patriotic education' during which monks, nuns and ordinary Tibetan adults and children must denounce the Dalai Lama, their spiritual leader, or risk arrest for refusing to do so,
- rewards of up to 80,000 Yuan (over \$10,000) for information about anyone attempting to leak these details to the western media.

As one Tibetan said: *"We are fighting for our very survival. Without the support of the world, we will lose. We are armed with portraits of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. They are armed with machine guns."*

If it's so bad, why don't Tibetans just leave?

The Chinese government makes it almost impossible for most Tibetans to acquire passports, so they simply cannot leave Tibet legally.

However, every year thousands of Tibetans make the perilous journey across the Himalayas - risking freezing to death or being shot by a Chinese border guard - desperate to reach Dharamsala, India. One of these shooting incidents was captured by a Romanian news crew in Nepal and can be viewed at <http://ca.youtube.com/watch?v=gPSbVPILeJ8&feature=related>

Dharamsala has been the home of the Dalai Lama since 1959 when he was forced to escape Tibet in the bloody aftermath of a failed uprising against Chinese rule. More than 100,000 Tibetans have followed him into exile. The elected Tibetan government-in-exile was set up in Dharamsala.

Tibetans continue to make this hazardous journey because Dharamsala is where the Dalai Lama lives and where Tibetans can live freely as Tibetans, speaking their language, practising their religion and educating their children in their history and culture.

Okay, but what's this got to do with the Olympics?

China's appalling human rights record was acknowledged as a key issue even before the 2008 Games were awarded.

In 2001, the International Olympics Committee (IOC) said it was "taking a bet" that human rights in Tibet and China would improve as a result of Beijing hosting the Olympics. **It lost its bet - the human rights situation in Tibet and China is worse now than it was in 2001.**

In order to win the Games, the Chinese government promised in 2001 to allow new freedoms for the foreign press to travel without restriction anywhere in China. **They broke this promise - as soon as unrest began, all foreign journalists were rounded up and thrown out of all Tibetan areas.** Canadians and other foreigners, many who have worked in China for years, are today being forced to leave reportedly as part of China's pre-Olympics crackdown.

In 2002, IOC President Jacques Rogge said that if "human rights are not acted upon to our satisfaction then we will act." **The IOC has failed to act.**

Now the IOC is complaining that the Olympics should not be politicised, ignoring the fact that the games became politicised the moment they were awarded to one of the world's most repressive regimes. **They can't have it both ways.**

According to the Olympic Charter: "Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy found in effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles." **How can the Chinese government, accused by the Dalai Lama of committing "cultural genocide" in Tibet, claim to support Olympic ideals?**

There are other human rights abuses. Why Tibet?

Yes, it's true that there are terrible human rights abuses in countries like Burma and Sudan. China is also criticised for supporting both these appalling regimes. However, China does not claim sovereignty over the Burmese or Sudanese people. In Tibet, the Chinese government is directly responsible for imprisoning and

torturing people, directly responsible for shooting peaceful protesters, directly responsible for threatening the survival of Tibetan culture. That's why Tibet matters so much during the Beijing Olympics.

Is the Canada Tibet Committee calling for a boycott?

The Canada Tibet Committee opposed the staging of the Olympics in a country with China's abysmal record on human rights. However, it is not the fault of athletes – who've been training and dreaming for years – that the IOC awarded the 2008 Games to one of the world's most repressive regimes.

Athletes should be allowed to compete. Athletes should also be entitled to an opinion and should not be gagged from freely expressing their opinions.

What's next?

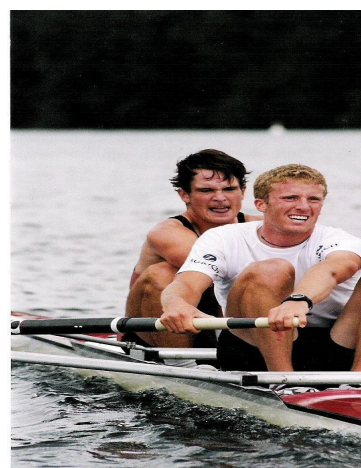
The Canada Tibet Committee hopes that athletes, journalists and Canadians visiting Beijing for the Games will take a moment to learn more about the situation in Tibet and China.

We recommend reading "Tibet: the Issue, the Stakes" which can be downloaded from the main page of our website at www.tibet.ca

An important way visitors, including athletes can make a difference is by discussing Tibet with the Chinese people they meet. Most Chinese people have no idea what is really going on in Tibet and are denied information by their government.

What does the Canada Tibet Committee want?

The Canada Tibet Committee is a non-governmental organisation of Tibetans and non-Tibetans living in Canada. The Committee has been campaigning for 20 years over the continuing human rights violations and lack of democratic freedom in Tibet. We want Tibetans to be free of the threats, intimidation and persecution of the Chinese government.



Former Team Canada member David Kay (rear) will bike across Canada to raise awareness of China's human rights record.

How can I find out more?

There's more information about Tibet and the impacts of the Chinese occupation on our website, www.tibet.ca. You can read about the plight of political prisoners and about the struggle of Tibetans to maintain their cultural identity.

You can find out more about what we do and about what Canadians can do to help Tibet.

Or you can call us at 514.487.0665.



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