



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Written testimony by the International Campaign for Tibet for the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission and the Congressional-Executive Commission on China Joint Hearing

China, Genocide and the Olympics

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The International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) believes that the selection of Beijing for the Winter Olympics in 2022 by the International Olympics Committee (IOC) was a mistake which ignored the downward spiral of human rights related developments that were manifest in 2015, when the Games were awarded. In September 2020, the International Campaign for Tibet joined a coalition of human rights groups representing Tibetan, Uyghur, Southern Mongolian, Hongkonger, Taiwanese, and Chinese people, along with other international human rights organisations, to call on the IOC to reverse its mistake and to revoke the decision to allow Beijing to host the 2022 Winter Olympic Games. In February 2021, ICT joined a call by a coalition of more than 180 civil society organisations to governments to commit to a diplomatic boycott of the Games. We reiterate these calls.

The IOC's decision did not take into consideration the experience gained following the award of the 2008 summer Olympics to China. In 2008, China had a historic opportunity to show the world that it is a worthy host of the Olympics. Both IOC and China highlighted the potential positive impacts the 2008 Olympics would have on Chinese society. However, reality proved the opposite. Presumptions, communicated vehemently by the IOC and its members at the time, that the Olympics would encourage China to embrace transparency, initiate concrete steps to fulfil its responsibilities under international law, and move to becoming a more accountable member of the international community did not materialize. Instead, the 2008 Olympics contributed to increasingly pronounced nationalistic and aggressive policies of the Chinese Communist Party, both internally and externally. While in 2008 the IOC falsely claimed the 2008 Games had led to positive change at the time already, it now absolves itself from any political responsibility. IOC President Thomas Bach in last October bluntly stated the Games were "not about politics." This lack of principle is unacceptable.

To take the case of Tibet, in March and April 2008, an unaccounted number of Tibetans had been killed or imprisoned by the Chinese authorities after large-scale and overwhelmingly peaceful protests across Tibet. It was particularly unacceptable to view the Olympic torch relay, supported by an array of Western corporate sponsors, ignoring and apparently attempting to whitewash the climate of fear and repression, on the streets of Lhasa which had been the site of violence and bloodshed just weeks before.

Beginning in 2009, around 135 Tibetans had self-immolated in protest of Communist Party policies. This was both as a result of the Orwellian clampdown on Tibetan society after 2008 and as a reaction to ever more invasive social and economic policies on the Tibetan plateau.

To this day, serious human rights violations, such as torture and ill-treatment, arbitrary detention and disappearance, and drastic interventions into religious and cultural life continue to take place in Tibet. Repressive political campaigns, institutional racism, and long-term policies that marginalize Tibetans economically, threaten the survival of the Tibetan identity, and cause tension and ill-will between the Chinese and Tibetan peoples.

The Panchen Lama, one of the most important figures in Tibetan Buddhism, has been missing since the Chinese government kidnapped him and his family on May 17, 1995 just days after the Dalai Lama identified him as the reincarnation of the previous Panchen Lama. The Panchen Lama was only six years old at the time. Last year, UN experts asked China "to ensure that Tibetan Buddhists are able to freely practice their religion, traditions and cultures without interference," as freedom of religion includes the right of Tibetan Buddhists and "to determine their clergy and religious leaders in accordance with their own religious traditions and practices."

After the 2008 Games, the IOC and the international community moved on. No substantial demand was made for an independent investigation into the numerous reports on killings in Tibet in March and April of 2008. After the 2008 experience, and now in the light of the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing, Tibetans, with greater urgency than ever, call for an accountable and responsible international Olympic movement.

In 2017, the IOC added human rights requirements aligned with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (the "Guiding Principles") in its host city agreements; those principles provide for entities to undertake human rights due diligence. Although Beijing was awarded the contract to host the Winter Olympics before the new human rights language was adopted, "Operational Requirements" included since then allow the IOC to negotiate for human rights protections and standards with the host city. Such due diligence has not been undertaken by the IOC.

The Olympic Code of Ethics says, 'Safeguarding the dignity of the individual is a fundamental requirement of Olympism' while the Charter aims to put 'sport at the service of the harmonious development of man, with a view to encouraging the establishment of a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity.'

In 2015, Chinese President Xi Jinping said in a video message relating to the 2022 Olympics that it would be "another opportunity to help advance the Olympic Movement and promote the Olympic Spirit," adding, "We will honour all the commitments."

The IOC, having awarded the 2022 Olympics to Beijing, now has the clear obligation to verify that China abides by its code of ethics and commitments. It also should make public the commitments that the Chinese Government has made in order to secure the Olympics to ensure transparent accountability. In particular, by holding the games in China while refusing to challenge China's record on human rights in Tibet and beyond, the IOC would in effect be telling the Chinese government that it can continue and even increase its repression of Tibetans without facing international consequences. Therefore, as a minimum, the IOC must speak up now, publicly and openly, without fear of reprisals, about the rights violations in Tibet, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Hong Kong and elsewhere.

Time is overdue for the IOC to take these steps. If the IOC does not see itself in the position to act accordingly, it should resolve to revoke its decision to award the 2022 Games to Beijing.

The history of human rights violations has taught us a clear lesson. Silence equates with licence and that those who turn away from crimes against humanity bear responsibility for them. If the IOC does nothing to address irrefutable, decades-long, persistent severe human rights violations in Olympic host countries like China, it becomes complicit.

For these reasons the International Campaign for Tibet calls, in particular, on:

Governments to refrain from attending in any capacity at the Olympic Games in Beijing 2022 and to press national Olympic committees and the IOC to raise human rights concerns with the Chinese government, and to publicly address them.

Governments and international organizations, including the EU and the African Union, to adopt a public position before the games on the need for the PRC to respect human rights in China, Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong, etc.

Governments, parliaments, and sports associations to educate their athletes about the human rights situation in Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong and other areas. They should invite victims' testimonies and those who advocate for victims' rights, into parliamentary hearings, meetings and public events.

Governments to apply the necessary pressure on China to ensure it does not increase its repression in Tibet before or during the games. Once the games are over, governments must closely monitor the situation to ensure there are no post-Olympic crackdowns in Tibet, as occurred in 2008. The IOC and the international community cannot simply move on after the 2022 Games end. Instead, it is obligatory upon them to make sure the Olympics do not result in increased human rights violation by the Chinese government. In this way, the Olympics can better fulfil its mission to foster an international community of harmony, respect, and dignity for all.

Moreover, the International Campaign for Tibet calls on:

- Corporate sponsors to call on national Olympic committees and the IOC to raise human rights concerns with the Chinese government, and to publicly address them, and to consider withdrawing their sponsorship of the 2022 Games, in order to be in compliance with principles according to the United Nations Global Compact, if national Olympic committees and the IOC do not respond adequately to this call.
- Independent media to be sensitive in their reporting about the 2022 Games, in particular with regard to the representation of the human rights and political situation in Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong or any other area of internal conflict.