



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Lodi Gyari, a lifetime of service to His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan people

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The International Campaign for Tibet is deeply saddened by the passing of Lodi Gyaltzen Gyari and wishes to express our condolences to his family and all those who knew him.

Mr. 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, passed away today, October 29, 2018 in San Francisco. He was 69.

Mr. Gyari was a seasoned and skilled diplomat who spent the majority of his professional career working directly for and on behalf of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He was an impassioned advocate for the Tibetan people, universal human rights and global democratic reform.

Richard Gere, Chairman of the Board of the International Campaign for Tibet said: "Lodi was my dear friend and partner and mentor for over thirty years. He created a life of great meaning and sacrifice that will resonate for many generations- throughout the Tibetan and non-Tibetan world. He was extraordinary."

Tempa Tsering, Board Member of the International Campaign for Tibet, said "I had the pleasure and also many memorable occasions of working with Gyari Rinpoche for decades on many different projects, programs and forums. Rinpoche was an inspiring leader, a true Tibetan nationalist, and he dedicated his life to Tibet and the Tibetan people. With his untimely demise, we Tibetans have lost a true nationalist and a great compatriot. We offer our heartfelt prayers to him and condolences to his family."

Mr. Gyari was appointed as the Special Envoy of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Washington DC in 1990 (while simultaneously holding the position of the President of the International Campaign for Tibet). During his tenure, Mr. Gyari was able to make profound political, economic and social contributions to the Tibetan cause. Through building on the visits by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and undertaking effective follow up initiatives, Mr. Gyari was able to successfully institutionalize the Tibetan issue within the United States government. He also earned and enjoyed access to the highest levels of leadership within both the US Congress and the White House.

In May 1998, Mr. Gyari was appointed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama to initiate and lead a dialogue process with the government of the People's Republic of China. He not only conducted nine rounds of

high-level talks in China and elsewhere (between 2002 and 2010) but also led an extensive behind-the-scenes diplomatic effort to sustain the process, expand the channels of communication, build trust with the Chinese leadership and maintain a broad international interest in the dialogue process.

Mr. Gyari successfully worked at the highest levels of the international arena. He was trusted, consulted and admired by many world leaders and members of the diplomatic corps. Heads of state, heads of government and policy makers consulted him on global and regional issues such as India-US relations, China-US relations and China-India relations because of his expertise, his deep knowledge of the region and his close personal connections with people in those countries.

Upon his retirement in 2012, the US Senate passed a resolution (S. Res. 557) saying that it "honors the service of Lodi Gyaltsen Gyari as Special Envoy of His Holiness the Dalai Lama; commends the achievements of Lodi Gyaltsen Gyari in building an international coalition of support for Tibet that recognizes—(A) the imperative to preserve the distinct culture and religious traditions of Tibet; and (B) that the Tibetan people are entitled under international law to their own identity and dignity and genuine autonomy within the People’s Republic of China that fully preserves the rights and dignity of the Tibetan people."

Prior to his arrival in the United States in 1990, Mr. Gyari served in the senior most elected and appointed positions of the Central Tibetan Administration – from Speaker of the Parliament to Cabinet Minister. Mr. Gyari became the youngest elected Speaker of the Tibetan Parliament when he assumed the position at the age of thirty. He was also one of the youngest people to be appointed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama to the Kashag (Cabinet) of the Central Tibetan Administration.

Biography of Lodi Gyari

Early Years

Mr. Gyari was born in 1949 into an influential family in Nyarong, Eastern Tibet and recognized as a reincarnation of Khenchen Jampal Dewé Nyima from Lumorap Monastery. His early education was in the traditional Tibetan monastic system, where incarnate lamas are offered a unique kind of training, an intensive and closely supervised curriculum somewhat akin to the tutorial system of universities like Oxford or Cambridge, except that in the Tibetan context, the student is taught one-on-one by an outstanding master scholar and practitioner.

When he was still young, Mr. Gyari’s monastic education and the life his family had known for generations were disrupted by the Chinese occupation of Tibet. Nevertheless, Mr. Gyari continued to cultivate and sustain his deep devotion to Buddhist traditions and maintained close relationships with many eminent Tibetan Buddhist masters and lineage heads. Over the years, he found himself uniquely placed to deepen his study of the rich wisdom of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition with its most revered and senior living exponents.

Mr. Gyari was drawn into the struggle for Tibetan freedom from an early age. In this effort, he reached out beyond the confines of his community to seek guidance and wisdom from eminent Indian leaders and thinkers, some of who were the giants of the Indian freedom movement. Later in life, Mr. Gyari was able to continue this quest to learn from prominent world leaders and opinion makers in the US and Europe. Mr. Gyari cultivated his relationship with these political mentors in the same way a devout

Buddhist student will learn from his teacher, and thus he had the unique opportunity to learn from both the world's greatest Buddhist thinkers and political leaders of our time.

As a young man, deeply affected by what he had seen of the brutal occupation of Tibet, Mr. Gyari longed to take up active resistance in order to help free his fellow Tibetans. He was selected to be educated as a translator for the resistance fighters being trained in the United States. However fate and circumstances intervened, and instead he became a journalist, first as the editor of Tibetan Freedom (a newspaper in Tibetan) and then of the Voice of Tibet (which subsequently became Tibetan Review), the first-ever English language publication by a Tibetan.

Mr. Gyari continued to believe in the need for armed resistance in Tibet but also saw the need for a strong grassroots political movement among the younger generation of Tibetans. To pursue this, in 1970 Mr. Gyari, together with three close associates, established the Tibetan Youth Congress with the goal of motivating the younger generation of the Tibetan community to unify and pursue the political struggle for Tibet's future. The establishment of the Tibetan Youth Congress created a strong political force in the exile community and is credited with introducing democratic principles and practices that have had a profound influence on the democratic evolution of the Tibetans in exile. Today the Tibetan Youth Congress is the largest Tibetan political organization in exile.

Mr. Gyari was regarded as a pioneering figure in introducing and establishing a culture of democracy and modernity into the exile Tibetan community. While the urgency of the time and the pace of events prevented Mr. Gyari from earning a degree or pursuing higher academic studies, this was to prove no disadvantage to his emerging role as a very effective and respected statesman.

As he matured, Mr. Gyari went through a profound change of heart, from dreaming of resistance to becoming a committed believer in nonviolence and the pursuit of a peaceful solution, as advocated by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. This transformation was a gradual one that began when Mr. Gyari rose through the ranks of the Tibetan leadership, first as the Speaker of the Parliament and then later as a member of the Kashag (Cabinet). Mr. Gyari was one of the most dedicated and articulate proponents of the Dalai Lama's Middle Way approach, which he called the most farsighted and brilliant strategy for the Tibetan people.

Advocacy in the United States

While in his role as Special Envoy to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Mr. Gyari also served as President of the International Campaign for Tibet in Washington DC from 1991 to 1999. During that time, the organization grew from fewer than 1,000 members to more than 75,000 and from an organization with little funding to one with a multi-million dollar budget. Today, the International Campaign for Tibet is the largest and most influential non-governmental organization in the West working on behalf of the Tibetan people with offices in Amsterdam, Berlin and Brussels, in addition to Washington DC. Following his term as President of the International Campaign for Tibet, Mr. Gyari joined the organization's Board of Directors as Executive Chairman, a position he held till 2014.

Mr. Gyari advocated for key legislation in the US Congress benefiting the Tibetan people. From 1991 to 2011, more than \$185 million in funding was set aside by Congress specifically for the Tibetans in Tibet and in exile. His efforts have contributed directly to the institutionalization of US support for Tibet in the form of the Tibet Policy Act (2002), comprehensive legislation that details policy and

material support to the Tibetan people and His Holiness the Dalai Lama for a negotiated solution to the Tibetan problem.

The Tibet Policy Act also codifies the establishment of the position of Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues within the US Department of State. The Special Coordinator's central objective is to promote substantive dialogue between the government of the People's Republic of China and the Dalai Lama or his representatives as well as assist in preserving the distinct religious, cultural and linguistic heritage of the Tibetan people.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Mr. Gyari also served as the head of the Tibet-United Nations initiative. He and his team successfully reintroduced the Tibet issue into the UN system when the UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities passed the first (since 1965) UN resolution on Tibet in August 1991, ending 25 years of silence on the situation in Tibet.

Negotiations with the People's Republic of China

Mr. Gyari's life-long diplomatic experience, his firm belief in the Dalai Lama's Middle Way approach and his passionate desire to help his fellow Tibetans led to the most important mission of his life, when His Holiness formally entrusted him with the task of leading negotiations with the government of the People's Republic of China.

Mr. Gyari had first visited China in 1982 and again in 1984 as one of the three members of a high-level delegation for exploratory talks. Beginning in 2002, he led the Tibetan team that conducted negotiations with the Chinese government for nine separate rounds of talks. During this period, his team presented a comprehensive proposal from His Holiness the Dalai Lama to the Chinese government for the implementation of genuine autonomy for the Tibetan people as a mutually beneficial solution to the conflict.

While the Chinese leadership bluntly accused Mr. Gyari of spearheading the internationalization of the Tibet issue on behalf of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, it also acknowledged that during Mr. Gyari's stewardship, the relationship between His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Beijing was at its most stable and long lasting.

With the transfer of political power from His Holiness the Dalai Lama to the democratically elected Tibetan leadership in 2011, Mr. Gyari decided to resign as Special Envoy. He remained in this position for another year as he hoped to maintain the fragile relationship with the government of the People's Republic of China, which he had worked hard to establish and sustain during his tenure. However, due to the utter lack of progress in the talks and the increased repression inside Tibet, he resigned in May 2012. However, Mr. Gyari continued to serve as a member of the Tibetan Task Force on Dialogue with China.

Commitments

Even as Mr. Gyari continued to be actively involved in projects and programs to promote dialogue between Tibetans and Chinese, he also felt it important to preserve Tibetan culture and empower the Tibetan people, particularly those in Tibet.

Mr. Gyari was the Chairman of the Board of the Conservancy for Tibetan Art and Culture, a US-based nonprofit organization that works to preserve Tibet's living cultural heritage in Tibetan cultural areas and communities around the world, working with leading institutions, scholars and religious leaders.

Additionally, Mr. Gyari both formally and informally supported and promoted numerous civil society, cultural and Buddhist organizations and projects dedicated to maintaining Tibet's cultural heritage, protecting the Tibetan environment, improving livelihoods, health and education for Tibetan communities, protecting sacred sites in Asia and preserving Tibetan texts, language and art. Through his involvement with nonprofit programs and civil society, Mr. Gyari has been instrumental in mobilizing over \$100 million in support for more than 20 organizations and programs.

Mr. Gyari did not limit his activities to Tibet issues. He also committed to initiatives to promote right livelihood and socially responsible investments and business to reduce poverty in the Himalayas and Southeast Asia.

His international activities also included active engagement in peacemaking and conflict resolution through Kreddha, the International Peace Council for States, Peoples and Minorities, which he cofounded with the late Don Rodrigo Carazo, former President of Costa Rica, and others. Through his involvement with the Sanithirakoses-Nagapateepa Foundation and as founding member of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, based in Bangkok, Mr. Gyari engaged in the promotion of responsible environmental stewardship and development and social justice in different parts of the world.

He was actively involved in alleviating the plight of other nations and peoples. He is one of the founders of the Allied Committee, an organization formed to advance the common issues faced by the Tibetans, Uyghurs and Mongolians under Chinese rule. This initiative inspired the founding of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, a worldwide organization established before the break-up of the Soviet Union to promote the rights of peoples and minorities through democracy and nonviolence. As a founder of UNPO, Mr. Gyari traveled extensively to the Baltic States and other East European nations, working with the democratic movements in those countries. UNPO became very active in promoting equitable solutions to the conflicts in East Timor, Burma, Aceh in Indonesia, Ogoni in Nigeria and Zanzibar and in supporting the Taiwanese democratic movement. UNPO effectively lobbied at the UN on a wide range of human rights issues and succeeded in placing the issue of population transfer on the agenda of the then-Commission on Human Rights, which appointed a special rapporteur, passed a resolution on the subject and approved a draft declaration, all of which represented an important milestone.

Mr. Gyari was also a cofounder with Michele Bohana, Joel McCleary and Lavinia Currier of the Institute for Asian Democracy (IAD), which became one of the first, most enduring and effective organizations working for human rights and democratic reform in Burma. In the early 1990s, IAD worked closely with human rights leaders such as then-Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan and published, for concerned international leaders, comprehensive reports on the situation in Burma.

Mr. Gyari was regularly invited to share his thoughts at academic institutions and universities in the US, Europe and Asia. He contributed to numerous publications and spoke at the Council on Foreign Relations, The Kennedy School of Government, The Brookings Institution, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Asia Society, Asia Centre in Paris, The Institute of South Asian Studies in

Singapore, India International Center, The Heritage Foundation, The Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan, Chatham House, Australian National University and others. Mr. Gyari traveled extensively and visited more than 50 countries. He was invited numerous times to testify before the US Congress, European Parliament and other government bodies and institutions on the Tibet issue and the threats confronting Tibet's cultural and spiritual heritage.

Mr. Gyari's articles were published in The South China Morning Post, Asian Wall St. Journal, The Washington Post, The Harvard Asia Quarterly and The Far Eastern Economic Review, etc. Mr. Gyari also contributed chapters in several published works, including 'Challenges faced by Tibetans in Reaching a Lasting Agreement with China' in *Implementing Negotiated Agreements: The Real Challenge to Intrastate Peace* (M. Boltjes, ed., The Hague 2007, Asser Press).

At the time of his retirement in 2014, Mr. Gyari wrote his personal reflections on his time in Washington DC and at ICT, entitled "[Personal words of gratitude from Lodi Gyaltsen Gyari.](#)"

He wrote, "Since its founding in 1988 the ICT team has devoted itself to supporting the Tibetan people and the vision of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. I am honored to have played a leadership role in this endeavor, from the inception of the organization to the present day. Now as I step down as Executive Chair of ICT and from its Board of Directors, I cannot help but reflect on my work here with a deep sense of satisfaction in our accomplishments."

Following his retirement, Mr. Gyari became a research scholar in the Asian Studies program at Georgetown University and a nonresident senior fellow in the Foreign Policy program at the Brookings Institution.

Mr. Gyari devoted his time until his passing in writing his memoir, which he felt would be his additional contribution to His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan cause. The memoir is in its final stages of completion.

Mr. Gyari is survived by his wife, Dawa Chokyi, their six children (Tenzing Dechen, Tenzing Choyang, Norbu Wangmo, Tashi Chodon, Tulku Penam and Tenzing Tsering), five grandchildren, his mothers as well as four brothers and three sisters.

Read "[Personal words of gratitude from Lodi Gyaltsen Gyari.](#)"

[See the Archive of Lodi Gyari statements.](#)