

Empowered Together: Our Journey at ITYF 2024

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Participants of the 2nd International Tibet Youth Forum Dharamsala, 3rd-5th July 2024

Within a year of its launch in 2023, the International Tibet Youth Forum has become a "must-go" event for advocates of the Tibetan movement for freedom. We consider the forum as a carnival of Tibetan advocacy and a marketplace of ideas where we can delve deeper into, deliberate, and discuss the Tibet movement for freedom. The widespread and in-depth advocacy of the Tibetan movement among the global community is the major vision and hallmark of the 16th Kashag, led by Hon. Sikyong Penpa Tsering, who has prioritised the inclusiveness of all sections of our community in the Tibetan freedom struggle.

We were honoured to receive an invitation to the second International Tibet Youth Forum 2024, held in Dharamsala from the 3rd to the 5th July, followed by the celebration of His Holiness's birthday. The conference brought together over 100 Tibetan youth from more than 13 countries, representing diverse educational and professional backgrounds. This prestigious forum provided a platform for Tibetan youth to exchange ideas, express their concerns, and collaboratively discuss the way forward. It also aims to nurture the already widespread and fragmented Tibetan advocacy efforts throughout the world into a well-coordinated movement. It seeks to connect advocates from different places, cultures, languages, and geographies, and unify them with the vision of Tibet advocacy.



Attending the ITYF 2024 was a transformative experience for us. The forum, which began with an enlightening CTA Tour, offered us an invaluable perspective on the governance and administrative efforts of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile. This tour was particularly captivating as it provided a unique insight into the workings of a government we had long heard about but never had the opportunity to explore deeply. We are extremely grateful to the Department of Information and International Relations (DIIR) of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile for organising this conference and providing us with a platform.



V-TAG India Team at ITYF 2024

The CTA Tour and Tibet Museum

Attending the International Tibet Youth Forum (ITYF) 2024 in Dharamsala was a deeply personal and transformative experience for both of us. The event began with an enlightening tour of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), which captivated our interest more profoundly than anticipated. As Tibetans living in exile, exploring the intricate workings of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile offered a unique and invaluable perspective on the governance and administrative efforts sustaining our community.

A particular highlight was our visit to the Tibet Museum. Despite having heard about it from friends, the opportunity to explore its exhibits was a first for us. Entering the museum, we were astonished by the richness and depth of our cultural heritage on display. The meticulous curation and preservation of artefacts vividly showcased the vibrant history and enduring spirit of the Tibetan people. This experience evoked a profound sense of pride and a poignant recognition of our resilience, highlighting the importance of preserving our heritage for future generations.



Forum Dynamics and Networking

The forum itself served as a powerful advocacy platform and a remarkable venue for fostering new relationships among participants. With 105 participants from abroad and India, the forum provided a unique opportunity for diverse voices to converge. Throughout the three-day event, we engaged in various sessions and activities, and it was heartening to witness participants mingling during tea breaks, exchanging ideas, and planning their actions for the Tibetan cause. The camaraderie and mutual support that developed were palpable, emphasising the forum's role in building a cohesive and motivated network of advocates.

Meeting and interacting with prominent Tibetan personalities at the forefront of the Tibetan movement was particularly enriching. Their unwavering dedication and enthusiasm invigorated our own commitment to the cause, empowering us to contribute more actively and passionately. The sessions at ITYF 2024 were exceptionally well-balanced, designed to be both informative and participatory. Organisers ensured that each session was engaging, fostering active involvement from all participants. We were divided into groups and assigned tasks that encouraged brainstorming, problem-solving, and collaboration, demonstrating that collective creativity and innovative solutions emerge when diverse perspectives are acknowledged and integrated.

Lessons in Advocacy

One profound lesson from the forum was that advocacy can manifest in numerous forms, transcending conventional boundaries. This realisation struck us powerfully during a performance by the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (TIPA). Their rendition of Tibetan folk songs and dances was not only entertaining but deeply moving, evoking a strong sense of cultural pride and sentimentality. Watching fellow Tibetans perform with such skill and passion filled me with immense pride in our rich cultural heritage, reminding us of the importance of preserving and celebrating our traditions.

Moreover, even seemingly small actions, such as an Instagram repost or story, are significant forms of advocacy. These digital gestures amplify our message, reaching a broader audience and raising awareness about the Tibetan cause. This understanding broadened our perspective on advocacy, highlighting that every effort, no matter how small, contributes to the larger movement. The power of social media as a tool for advocacy cannot be underestimated, as it allows us to connect, inform, and inspire others globally.

Key Insights from the Forum

At the 2nd International Tibet Youth Forum, we learned three key things:

1. Advocacy doesn't only encompass Tibetan human rights and freedom; it also means changing the perspective of established stigma or stereotypes about the Tibetan community held by third parties.
2. Any movement or advocacy work requires a collective effort, as it cannot be done single-handedly. For that collective effort, good coordination is needed, which the forum provides by allowing participants to spend three days together discussing a wide range of topics and, most significantly, becoming familiar with each other.



3. Thorough research on Tibet is a prerequisite for any effective and sound advocacy. An example of this is the issue of colonial boarding schools.

Building Connections and Sharing Insights

We had the opportunity to share a table with numerous bright young Tibetan students and employees from various backgrounds. We discussed many topics, including Tibet, China, Sino-Indian relations, and their confidence in US political support for Tibet. The determination of the Tibetan students from America was particularly heartening. Despite being thousands of miles away from Tibet, their engagement with the movement and their connection to Tibetan culture, such as singing Tsewang Lhamo's legendary song "The Wonders of Tibet" and referring to Tibet as "Vhoe" (Amdo dialect), demonstrate a strong touch and unwavering commitment to the cause, which is quite rare to observe outside Tibet.

Conversing with students experienced in lobbying in their home countries and comparing that with the situation in India was immensely valuable. As we contemplate effective lobbying strategies in India, considering its political fragility and geographical proximity to China, these insights are incredibly resourceful.

Going Forward

Our combined experiences at ITYF 2024 have profoundly renewed our commitment to advocating for Tibet. We have learned that advocacy is multifaceted and requires both individual efforts and collective coordination. The forum has equipped us with valuable insights, inspiration, and a renewed sense of hope and enthusiasm. Moving forward, we are equipped with a renewed sense of hope, enthusiasm, and a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of advocacy. We are more motivated than ever to work tirelessly for the betterment of Tibet and its people, knowing that our collective efforts can make a significant difference in the ongoing struggle for Tibetan rights and autonomy.



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