

The Snow Lion's Roar Echoes in Tokyo: The 9th WPCT and its significance to Tibet

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Tibetan leadership with the Japanese Tibetan Parliamentary Support Group in Tokyo, Japan on 29th May, 2025. Courtesy Central Tibetan Administration

It was on 30th November 2023 at the Tibet Talk series hosted by the India Foundation that the speaker of the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile (TPIE), Venerable Khenpo Sonam Topgyal mentioned the 9th World Parliamentarians' Convention on Tibet (WPCT) as the 8th WPCT has then been held at Washington D.C. from 22-23 June, 2022. Since then, there has been much engagement and deliberations on it.

From 3rd June 2025 - the Japanese Parliamentary Support Group for Tibet (JPSGT) will support the TPIE (legislative wing of the Central Tibetan Administration) in hosting the 9th WPCT in Tokyo, Japan.

What is the World Parliamentarians' Convention on Tibet (WPCT)?

The World Parliamentarians' Convention on Tibet is a major event organised by the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile in association with Parliamentary support groups in Tibet to engage with lawmakers of democratic nations around the world - to garner coordinated support for Tibet.

The first such WPCT was held in New Delhi, India from 18-20 March 1994 under the aegis of the All-Party Indian Parliamentary Forum for Tibet (APIPFT), where parliamentarians from 25 countries participated. During this landmark event, the New Delhi Statement on Tibetan Freedom consisted of 12 points.

To highlight a few would be:

- Tibet was a separate, independent and sovereign nation before its invasion and subsequent



Images from the 2022 Washington D.C. WPCT. Courtesy Central Tibetan Administration

occupation by the People's Republic of China (PRC).

- The Congress of the United States of America passed a resolution on October 28, 1991, recognising that Tibet, consisting of the three traditional areas of Dhotoe (Kham), Dhomey (Amdo) and U-Tsang, is an occupied country etc.

These 2 points along with the remaining 10 totaling to 12, spotlighted the situation of Tibet to the world.

Following its success there have been 7 subsequent WPCTs held till date in different countries of the world with the 9th such WPCT being held in Tokyo from 3rd June onwards.

The list of WPCT is as follows:

1. New Delhi, 1994
2. Vilnius, Lithuania - 1995
3. Washington D.C., USA - 1997
4. Edinburgh, Scotland - 2005
5. Rome, Italy - 2009
6. Ottawa, Canada - 2012
7. Riga, Latvia - 2019
8. Washington D.C., USA - 2022
9. Tokyo, Japan – 2025

Leading up to the 9th WPCT in Tokyo, Japan:

It was on 31st July 2024 when Speaker Ven. Khenpo Sonam Topgyal visited Japan and addressed the Japanese Parliamentarian Support Group for Tibet (JPSGT) where he publicly mentioned the plan and his intention to host the 9th WPCT in Tokyo, Japan.

This call was well received by the JPSGT who affirmed their support. This group continues to hold the largest parliamentary support group for Tibet and is uniquely bipartisan. According to many, it was initially formed in 1989 in the wake of the Lhasa protest in Tibet, which was then extensively discussed in the National Diet (Parliament of Japan).

However, the October 2024 Japanese election among others impacted this very group hard, with nearly 30% of its members losing their parliamentary seats. Many raised their concerns about whether the 9th WPCT could be held in Tokyo with such a predicament. Here, Dr. Tsewang Gyalpo

Arya, the representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Japan stated 'Plans for the WPCT were meticulously laid out during Speaker Khenpo Sonam Tenphel's official visit to Japan in July, with inputs from the former Chairman Shimomura Hakuban, General Secretary Ishikawa Akimasa, and the committee members. These plans are well-documented, ensuring continuity regardless of leadership changes. Working along these very lines, on 19th December 2024 - the JPSGT working committee meeting was held and it unanimously appointed Yamatani Eriko (Member of the House of Councillors of Japan) as its new Chairperson and Yamada Hiroshi (Member of the House of Councillors of Japan) as its General Secretary. Both of them stated that they would continue to do their best for Tibet and engage with other parliamentarians on Tibet.

These clear assurances in line with the change in leadership/membership of the JPSGT were among the key drivers in making the 9th WPCT a reality even amidst such unforeseen changes. And it is here where one must credit and laud the Japanese for staying true to their commitment, an aspect that unfortunately seems to be on the decline elsewhere.

Hence, from 3rd June 2025 onwards the 9th WPCT shall be held in Tokyo, Japan. The leadership included the Sikyong (President) Penpa Tsering of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the TPIE Ven. Khenpo Sonam Tenphel and Dolma Tsering respectively are already in Japan and held a public engagement with the JPSGT at the National Diet on 29th May 2025.

The significance of the 9th WPCT:

This 9th WPCT akin to its previous conventions brings together parliamentarians from different democratic nations together and discusses on Tibet and how best to resolve its dispute with China in such changing geopolitical times.

Besides the above-mentioned members of the Tibetan leadership, 11 members of the TPIE representing the 3 Cholkas (Provinces) of Tibet namely a. Amdo b. Kham c. U-Tsang and the different sects from the Tibetan tradition of Buddhism shall be taking part.



The Japan Parliamentary Support Group for Tibet Committee Members. Courtesy Central Tibetan Administration.



The particular significance of the 9th WPCT are:

- The optics of a gathering of world parliamentarians on Tibet in Tokyo - a city that is very close to Beijing in terms of distance and has an influx of a large number of Chinese including tourists will certainly have Beijing ask a lot of questions. Especially considering how sensitive they view Tibet.
- With the onset of Tariffs from Washington and shifting geopolitics, Tokyo along with Seoul and Beijing economically came together. They held their 1st trilateral meetings on the economy after a gap of 5 years. Amidst this alliance hosting this significant meeting on Tibet that draws the ire from Beijing indicates how Tokyo and Beijing do not see eye to eye on everything.
- This is only the 2nd WPCT held in Asia with the remaining 7 either being held in North America or Europe. This draws attention to all as to how Tibet. However, though having firm support from the West including Europe and North America (the US and Canada in particular here and Mexico of late), it is Asia where Tibet is located geographically. And this discussion on Tibet is happening in the very region, where the dispute is present and impacts the most.
- How Asia can support Tibet? Tokyo and Taipei being some centres of engagement will be among the themes of discussion in my opinion. This to an extent was even mentioned by His Excellency Sikyong Penpa Tsering when he requested how due to US Aid cuts, CTA is working towards diversifying its funds and here Japan which is the 5th largest economy in the world can certainly explore how best it can help here. India another Asian giant has already put its hands up in supporting Tibet in such times – the visit by the Indian foreign secretary to Dharamshala in late April is an indication of this.
- Passing resolutions on Tibet, as this has been a precedent set up by previous WPCTs. For e.g. after the 2022 Washington D.C. WPCT in 2024 we witnessed the Resolve Tibet Act. Would a similar act in line with Japanese domestic politics be passed on Tibet? or would other countries that would have parliamentarians raise it up to their respective parliaments?

Moving forward:

The resolutions, statements and participation at the 9th WPCT will be keenly followed and it will also give some indications to us all as to how the world leaders look at Tibet. Furthermore, the level of engagements with their respective governments after the 9th WPCT will be of much intrigue as from the past there were set precedents of discussions on Tibet taking place after these gatherings led by the very parliamentarians who took part in it.

Will there be a Tokyo Statement on Tibet? One will have to wait and watch as things unfold. One thing is for certain though in the midst of these changes - that is Tibet being in the minds of world leaders and how it will be discussed in Tokyo. A city that is only around 10 hours by flight to Lhasa (the capital of Tibet) according to Google.



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