

# Tibet and the Olympics?

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Tibet has recently been all over the headlines, and it's a story that isn't going away anytime soon. As China attempts to deal with upheaval and protesters in Tibet, it also is preparing for the Olympic games and the route of the torch of the Olympic flame has been an avenue of dissent for those protesting China's handling of the crisis.

Tibetan Buddhism has had supporters for years, including Hollywood star **Richard Gere**, who opposes the Chinese government's oppressive policies. Gere met its religious leader, the Dalai Lama, in the early 1980s, and has attended many of the annual teachings in Dharamsala. "It's not often that you meet a truly great man," Gere has said. "He's the real thing. It's rare to be in the presence of someone who wants nothing more than your happiness."

Other stars, including **Orlando Bloom**, **Kate Bosworth**, and **Keanu Reeves**, have also helped bring an appreciation of the Eastern religion to the West.

Buddhist monks in Tibet recently began to demonstrate against the lack of religious freedom in the country and for the return of the Dalai Lama, who has been exiled for many years. The Chinese crackdown has caused a worldwide outcry against the oppressive and sometimes-brutal methods the government uses to control protestors.

Now, with the Olympic Games on the horizon, the Chinese government faces a problem: How does it handle the protests that will continue to occur in Tibet, while hosting a sporting spectacle that is supposed to embody global goodwill and the sportsmanship inherent in international competition.

As the Olympic flame continues on its path to its eventual destination in Beijing, China seems to have seriously underestimated worldwide response to its treatment of Tibet. In a world where anyone with a cellphone camera can capture a news image and have it beamed instantaneously around the globe, a tide of unfavorable public opinion to events like this can be generated within hours.

It remains to be seen how this incident will affect the Olympic games, but there is already a talk of boycott from several nations. In the United States politicians have begun to voice support for action against China, but it's difficult to penalize a country we are so economically dependent upon.

It's a complex issue that won't be resolved soon, and, if the crackdown continues, China risks a threat to the overall unity of the Olympic Games this summer.



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