



students for a free tibet

Olympics Year Summary, August 2007 - September 2008

introduction / summary

introduction

This has been an historic year for Tibet and an exceptional year for Students for a Free Tibet (SFT). We successfully carried out twenty five major direct actions in seven countries; held four international and twenty regional trainings on three continents; organized three high profile in-person and two groundbreaking online press conferences; toured Tibetan communities in eighteen North American cities and raised \$1 million for the Olympics campaign. Through innovative and strategic campaigning, creative nonviolent direct actions and the use of cutting-edge technology, we used the Beijing Olympics to show China's current and future leaders, and decision makers worldwide, that Tibet is an issue of global significance that must be resolved before China will ever be truly accepted and respected as a leader on the world stage.

campaigns & actions

campaigns

2008 Beijing Olympics - This year marked the culmination of SFT's 7-year campaign to ensure China's occupation of Tibet was a pressing global issue during the Beijing Olympics.

August 2007, One Year Countdown to the Beijing Games: One year before the start of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Lhadon Tethong, SFT's Executive Director traveled to Beijing to speak out against China's occupation of Tibet. From her blog (www.BeijingWideOpen.org) she openly challenged the Chinese government's Olympics propaganda and claims over Tibet. Her actions garnered international media attention and after six days she was arrested, interrogated and deported by the authorities who claimed her actions "threatened the stability of China."

On the eve of the one year countdown celebrations a team of six SFT members unfurled a 450 square foot banner on the Great Wall of China reading "One World, One Dream: Free Tibet 2008." Our on-site communications team was able to break through China's "Great Fire Wall" and upload images of the action to the Internet in real time. Both BeijingWideOpen.org and the Great Wall banner received incredible international media attention and helped propel the Tibet issue to the forefront of the growing controversy surrounding the Olympics in China.

March to May 2008, China's International Torch Relay: This past spring, as a popular uprising spread across Tibet, Tibetans in exile and their supporters took to the streets to protest Beijing's Olympics torch relay and launched their own global Tibetan freedom torch relay. SFT was a driving force behind many of the global protests along the international route of China's torch relay. We carried out creative, ambitious, and strategic actions in Olympia, London, Paris, and San Francisco, including a banner-hang on the Golden Gate Bridge that was seen by millions of people worldwide when it was covered live on CNN and other major television networks and subsequently landed on the front page of international and national newspapers – including *The New York Times*.



Great Wall of China
Aug. 7th, 2007



Golden Gate Bridge
April 7th, 2008

campaigns & actions (cont...)



Marchers on the March to Tibet arrive at their camp near Dera, Himachal Pradesh. March 2008

campaigns

The Tibetan People's Uprising Movement and March to Tibet: On January 4th, 2008, the Tibetan People's Uprising Movement was launched by five leading Tibetan NGOs in India to strengthen the Tibetan resistance movement and draw global attention to the human rights crisis in Tibet in the lead up to the Olympics. SFT HQ provided key leadership and support for the Uprising Movement, which on March 10th commenced an historic March to Tibet from Dharamsala, India. Lhadon Tethong and Tenzin Dorjee (SFT's Deputy Director) traveled to India in November and facilitated the first meeting between all major Tibetan NGOs in Dharamsala where the idea for the March to Tibet took root. In January, Lhadon returned to India to support the launch of the campaign, while Tenzin Dorjee returned in February to facilitate trainings for the organizers. Lhadon returned again in March to help launch the March to Tibet and help coordinate international media coverage.

No Torch in Tibet Campaign - Targeting the IOC and Olympic Sponsors: In the wake of the March uprising, SFT launched an urgent campaign to demand the International Olympic Committee (IOC) cancel the Tibet leg of the torch relay. We released a website www.NoTorchInTibet.org and an animated logo jamming the official torch relay logo. The animation received nearly 750,000 views and has been uploaded to almost 2,500 online locations. Thousands of our members faxed and called the IOC demanding Tibet be removed from the torch relay route. SFT also produced an online film targeting the individual IOC board members.

In April, we spoke out against Coca-Cola's sponsorship of the torch relay at the company's annual meeting; faxed and hand delivered over 4,000 letters to their corporate offices; and held an online Coca-Cola brand jamming competition. In May, SFT grabbed international headlines when our Campaign Director, Kate Woznow, and SFT Canada Director, Tsering Lama, were detained and deported from Hong Kong where we had planned to hold a press conference in conjunction with the torch relay. Alternatively, we held SFT's first-ever live webcast press conference from Toronto, New York and London. International journalists who had planned to attend our briefing in Hong Kong logged onto the webcast and covered it in their feature pieces about the torch relay. In June, we held an in-person press conference and staged a dramatic mock "die-in" in Athens at the IOC's final executive board meeting before the Olympics.

August 6th-22nd, Non-violent Direct Action during the Olympics in Beijing and around the world: Despite the Chinese government's overwhelming and widely covered efforts to suppress all voices of dissent at the Olympics, SFT successfully carried out ten powerful actions in Beijing and Hong Kong at iconic locations such as the Bird's Nest stadium and Tiananmen Square. In all, 70 SFT activists, supported by dozens of others, traveled to Beijing – 55 were detained, some for up to 6 days, and then deported - in what was the largest coordinated protest effort during the Games. Our actions inserted Tibet into the political coverage of the Olympics and put Tibet at the center of global discussions on human rights and China.

On August 6th, the global launch of our Olympics Uprising for Tibet, SFT members took part in direct actions at Chinese embassies and consulates worldwide, including Brussels, San Francisco, NY, London, Paris, Toronto and Vancouver.



SFT's No Torch in Tibet logo



Bird's Nest Banner Hang
Aug. 6th, 2008

campaigns & actions (cont...)

Creative use of Internet Technology & Media: SFT's official Olympics website www.FreeTibet2008.org received nearly 80,000 unique visitors in August. The site featured a media center, photo and video gallery, and streamlined information and analysis from SFT's website www.studentsforafreetibet.org and leading blogs blog.studentsforafreetibet.org and www.BeijingWideOpen.org. We also launched a cutting edge online video channel www.FT08.tv that broadcasted daily during the Games. Free Tibet 2008 Television featured exclusive interviews with Tibet activists, our own footage of the protests in Beijing, and behind-the-scenes highlights otherwise unavailable to the public. The 108 videos posted on the channel were viewed over 52,000 times.

SFT also worked with the International Tibet Support Network to launch our long-planned "Athlete Wanted" campaign through the website www.AthleteWanted.org. We distributed thousands of leaflets and held press conferences at both the U.S. national track and field trials in Eugene and the U.S. Olympic Team processing center in San Jose. This campaign culminated in the placement of a full-page ad in *The New York Times* on July 29th.

human rights & political prisoners

Campaigned against increased religious restrictions: We mobilized SFT's online action network to campaign for the release of Runggye Adak, a nomad father of 11 children sentenced to eight years in prison for publicly calling for the return of the Dalai Lama. In October 2007, at the Dalai Lama's Congressional Gold Medal Ceremony in DC, we distributed 5,000 postcards protesting China's new law to control the recognition of reincarnated Buddhist teachers.

The March Uprising: SFT's core leadership - from Dharamsala, London and New York - played a critical role in organizing information from sources in Tibet and providing analysis and commentary to the international media during and after the Uprising. Several international breaking news stories were the result of leads and assistance that we provided to Beijing journalists. SFT also took a lead in organizing regional vigils and protests at Chinese Consulates and Embassies around the world.

organizational growth & development

Held Free Tibet! Action Camp X in India: Over 40 Tibetan and Indian students went through our innovative non-violent direct action and strategic planning-based curriculum. Several participants became key organizers of the March to Tibet and media spokespeople during the March uprising in Tibet.

Launched an intensive Olympics training program in January 2008: Twenty trainings were held in Mexico City, London, Paris, and cities across North America in the lead up to the torch relay and the Olympic Games. Two larger international trainings - in Oakland and near Dusseldorf, Germany - provided the over 70 activists involved in actions inside Beijing, as well as the coordinators of actions at Chinese embassies and consulates worldwide, specialized training in direct action tactics, media, and the use of cutting edge communications technology.

March to Tibet trainings held in India: In February and March, Tendor and Lhadon led non-violence, media and strategic planning trainings for the Tibetan community leaders and over 300 marchers from across India.



*Light Banner at the Bird's Nest
Aug. 19th, 2008*



*Free Tibet! India Action Camp
Oct. 2007*

Leadership development

Online, chapter & membership growth: SFT's online Action Network grew to over 44,000 members with over 14,000 new members since January alone. 170 new chapters registered and we now have chapters in 40 countries around the world with significant growth in France, Japan, Germany, Poland and Mexico. In February, SFT recruited thousands of people to take part in the Facebook "Causes" Giving Challenge, raising \$125,000 and increasing the number of members subscribed to our Facebook groups from 12,000 to 38,000.

SFT HQ's gold medal team: In order to successfully execute our Olympics action plan, we temporarily hired several well-known and experienced action and media specialists to join our HQ team, including full-time Olympics and Direct Action Coordinators, a part-time Technology Director, two part-time PR/Communications consultants, a Tibetan community organizer, a Grassroots organizer and a part-time Logistics coordinator.

Fundraising success: SFT staff and board members worked around the clock to reach our goal of an ambitious one million "extra" dollars for our Olympics campaign. In total we raised \$1,388,842.99 (between Sept. 1st 2007 and Aug. 31st 2008). We more than doubled the number of donors giving through our online Action Network and along with the Facebook "Causes" Giving Challenge, we raised over \$220,000 through online donations, seven times the amount of money raised online in the previous year!



Chinese Embassy; Ottawa,
Aug. 6th, 2008

international organizing

SFT Canada – Doubled its annual income, established an office in Toronto with a full-time national coordinator and played an important leadership role within the city's large and influential Tibetan community. Following the success of its Olympics campaigning in key Canadian cities, SFT Canada is now a leading voice for Tibet in the Canadian media.

SFT India – Hired a young Indian as Grassroots Coordinator, increasing the office to three full-time staff. SFT India was a critical organizing force behind the March to Tibet and continues to gain ground as a respected organizing body and a leading force within the exiled Tibetan community in Dharamsala and across India.

SFT Europe – SFT UK and France coordinated actions and protests during the torch relay in London, which were widely covered by the UK, French and European media. SFT UK board members were some of our main spokespeople and action team leaders on the ground in Beijing this summer as well as in London.

conclusion

The Uprising in Tibet and the outpouring of global public support that followed during the torch relay propelled the occupation of Tibet into the media spotlight and made it a key issue going into the Games. In spite of the billions of dollars the Chinese government spent on the Olympics to secure a controversy free 'coming out' party, SFT successfully harnessed the power of our international grassroots to ensure Tibetan voices and voices promoting freedom and human rights were heard in Beijing and around the world. March 10th, 2009 will mark 50 years since the 1959 Tibetan National Uprising. SFT will use the energy and momentum from this Olympics year to carry out creative campaigns that highlight Tibetan voices from inside Tibet and demonstrate the growing strength of the Tibet movement. We will use this historic moment to show that 50 years is enough and that the Chinese government must bring an end to its occupation of Tibet once and for all.



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