The Dalai Lama Visits IUB
Calls for Dialogue, Compromise

On July 26 Indiana University hosted His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet, during a three-day Bloomington visit that took him to both the university and the Tibetan Cultural Center, on the outskirts of town.

This was the Nobel laureate’s second visit to Bloomington and the IU campus, and as was the case with his first visit in 1987, he was the focus of intense attention wherever he went.

On the IU campus the Buddhist leader gave a public talk that drew an overflow crowd to the IU Auditorium where he was introduced by IU President Myles Brand.

The Dalai Lama spoke to the packed hall for about 45 minutes, addressing the topic of “Overcoming Differences” with clarity and humor while making a case for tolerance and respect for different views. At the same time he also drew the audience’s attention to repression and human rights violations in his homeland.

Considered by Tibetan Buddhists to be the reincarnation of the Buddha of Compassion, the Dalai Lama also heads the exiled Tibetan government in India.

After his talk, the Dalai Lama answered a few questions from the audience before leaving to a standing ovation.

In addition to the public talk, the Dalai Lama’s schedule included several other activities. Earlier in the day he arrived on campus to be present as a tree was planted in his honor at Bryan House, the president’s residence.

The ceremony was hosted by Dean for International Programs Patrick O’Meara and among those in attendance were two groups of Indiana high school students. One group was taking part in a two-day seminar at IU organized by PeaceJam, an organization dedicated to teaching nonviolence to young people, while the other was studying approaches to international problems under the aegis of the Indiana Center for Global Change and World Peace.

Following the tree planting ceremony the Dalai Lama spent some time speaking with reporters in the Indiana Memorial Union and then left to meet with President Brand. The two conversed privately for about twenty minutes before the president escorted the Dalai Lama to a reception in his honor at the University Club.

There President Brand presented the Dalai Lama with the Indiana University President’s Medal to mark the high esteem with which the holder of the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize is regarded by the university community.

The Dalai Lama was born in the Amdo region of Tibet in 1935 to

“Nonviolence is the only option for humanity.”
— His Holiness the Dalai Lama

IU President Myles Brand listens as His Holiness the Dalai Lama addresses a capacity crowd gathered at the IU Auditorium in Bloomington.

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peasant family. While still a child he was recognized by the monastic hierarchy as the incarnation of the 13th Dalai Lama and taken to the Tibetan capital of Lhasa for education and training for the responsibilities that he would one day take up as Tibet’s spiritual and temporal leader.

In 1950 the Chinese army, claiming the country as a part of China, crossed Tibet’s de facto frontiers and left Tibet with no choice but to accede to annexation by the People’s Republic of China.

Subsequent Chinese measures and policies provoked widespread resistance in Tibet and produced a simmering rebellion that spread throughout the country and exploded in an uprising in Lhasa in March, 1959. The revolt was suppressed only after a long period of bloodshed. The Dalai Lama and over 100,000 other Tibetans were forced into exile in India where most of them have since resided.

During his years in exile the Dalai Lama has retained the loyalty of the vast majority of Tibetans. Until this past year, when strict laws and regulations designed to undercut his influence were implemented by the Chinese government, his picture was ubiquitous all over Tibet.

The Dalai Lama has followed events in Tibet with great concern. And throughout this period, from the depths of the 1960s and 1970s—when hundreds of thousands of Tibetans are believed to have perished as a result of Chinese repression up to the present day—he has working unceasingly to find a nonviolent way to resolve the Tibetan tragedy.

It was specifically for his nonviolent activities in the cause of Tibet’s liberation that the Nobel Committee conferred the 1989 Peace Prize on him.

The Dalai Lama had originally decided to come to Bloomington this year to preside over the laying of a foundation stone for a new temple at the Tibetan Cultural Center and to give Buddhist teachings there.

That center is led by IU Professor Emeritus Thubten Jigme Norbu, elder brother of the Dalai Lama and for many years a pillar of IU’s program in Tibetan Studies.

Through the efforts of Norbu and others, IU has maintained a reputation as one of the country’s premier centers for the study of Tibet. Norbu joined the Department of Uralic and Altaic Studies (now the Department of Central Eurasian Studies) in 1965 and remained an active faculty member until his retirement in 1987.

He still maintains a high profile in Tibetan activities in Bloomington and in activities designed to create an awareness of the plight of Tibet. Against this background one can appreciate the larger significance of the Dalai Lama’s visit.

—Elliot Sperling
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Deadline: 5:00 p.m., Monday, October 28, 1996