



Dalai Lama Avoids Topic of Tibet in First Appearance at Seattle Conference

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SEATTLE —

In his first public appearances since arriving for a five-day conference on compassion, the Dalai Lama sidestepped a question about the turmoil in his native Tibet, instead talking about how dialogue and respect are the tools for transforming enemies.

"The only way to transform our enemy to become our friend is dialogue, respect," the exiled Tibetan spiritual leader said in response to a question. "That's a way of compassion."

Ann Curry of NBC News, a last-minute addition to a panel discussion on compassion and the media, then asked specifically how he could forgive his enemies and remain hopeful about the situation in Tibet.

He sidestepped the question, talking in general terms about creating better communities and forgiving enemies, and expressing hope that the world will see more compassion with more female leaders.

"Generally, females are more sensitive; there's a greater potential to develop compassion," he said.

There was no discussion of the U.S. presidential race.

Recent protests in Tibet against five decades of Chinese rule have been the largest and most sustained in almost two decades and have fueled protests that have disrupted the global torch relay for this summer's Olympic Games in Beijing.

China has accused the Dalai Lama of being involved in the uprising. He has said he wants greater autonomy for the remote mountain region but is not seeking independence.

During a stopover in Japan en route to the United States for the five-day Seeds of Compassion conference here, he said he has always supported China's hosting of the Games this summer, but added that Beijing cannot suppress protests in Tibet with violence or tell those calling for more freedom in his homeland "to shut up."

Friday's final panel discussion included singer Dave Matthews, who thanked the Dalai Lama for coming to Seattle in light of the situation in Tibet.

"You must be in a lot of pain for your people," Matthews said.

Organizers say the Seeds of Compassion gathering is essentially nonpolitical, and generally there were no mentions of Tibet, but conference co-founder Dan Kranzler alluded to it on Friday morning, telling the Dalai Lama, "The world knows the truth."

Also Friday, the Olympic torch arrived in Buenos Aires in the only South American stop of its world tour. Police, security officials and fences kept protesters from the torch on its 8.5-mile route in the capital of Argentina, in the most trouble-free torch relay in nearly a week.

The first event of the Seattle conference was a dialogue between scientists and the Dalai Lama about early childhood development and compassion. Friday's events went smoothly, with almost no demonstrators on either side of the Tibet issue.

The mood was lighthearted, with the Dalai Lama often joking during the first two events about his personal life, and reflecting on his own parents.

"I'm happy to be spending time sitting with experienced scientists of compassion," he said. "Compassion is the motivation, but the real factor is action to change."

Panelists talked about encouraging parents or caretakers to spend more time with children and discussed how young children's brains are shaped by their experiences and early relationships.

Conference organizers have said they expected to draw more than 150,000 people to dozens of workshops and events. More than 12,000 people showed up for Friday's first two panel discussions.

Friday's last scheduled event was a benefit concert headlined by Matthews in which Death Cab For Cutie made a surprise appearance. The Dalai Lama did not attend.

The Dalai Lama fled to India after a failed uprising in 1959 in Tibet but remains the religious and cultural leader of many Tibetans. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989.

He arrived for Friday's sessions surrounded by heavy security with police on foot, motorcycles and horses. The State Department and Seattle police are providing the security. He traveled in fortified motorcades between events.

Meanwhile, the Seattle chapter of the Tibetan Youth Congress, a group China labeled as a terrorist organization on Friday, planned a candlelight event Saturday in downtown Seattle. Some Chinese students at the University of Washington are expected to protest Monday when the Dalai Lama receives an honorary degree.