

Truth appears to have been a collateral victim of the 6.9 level magnitude earthquake that struck Jyekundo on the Tibetan plateau on April 14 last week.

The vast majority of the thousands of dead were proud Tibetans and deserved to be mourned as such. Yet most of the world governments, including Canada's, unfortunately made no mention of the Tibetans in their condolence messages to China. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton omitted the word "Tibet" from her statement, saying instead: "Our thoughts and prayers are with those injured or displaced, and all the people of China on this difficult day."

The media everywhere should have located the tragedy in Tibet's historic Kham province. Coverage of the quake on CNN and the BBC however made little or no mention of the victims as Tibetan.

There are credible reports as well that the final death toll could reach over 10,000 with 100,000 left homeless. The survivors also need international help, which has been offered but which Beijing is refusing.

This lack of acknowledgment is sadly typical of how the world tiptoes around the issue of Tibet so as not to risk angering China. The harsh reality is too often ignored.

On the other hand, photos from the Boston Globe's website and an account in the New York Times constitute independent journalism at its best.

Painful past

For context, there are the harsh facts of Chinese colonization over five decades. Tens of thousands of Tibetans have been killed during the five decades of colonization with hundreds of thousands more imprisoned. Over 6,000 monasteries, nunneries, and temples have been pillaged and destroyed. Thousands more Tibetans have disappeared in recent times or were imprisoned.

In *Mao: The Unknown Story*, authors Jung Chang and Jon Halliday detail Beijing's treatment of the Tibetan people. In 1959, Mao wrote about the uprising then underway in Tibet, caused in part by drastically increased food requisitions there because of the famine conditions created across China by his catastrophic 'Great Leap Forward.' "This [rebellion] is ... a good thing. Because this makes it possible to solve our problems through war," Mao said.

When word later spread in Tibet that Mao planned to kidnap the then very young Dalai Lama, thousands of Tibetans protested in front of the Potala Palace in Lhasa, shouting "Chinese get out." Mao cabled that the Dalai Lama should be allowed to escape because he feared his death would "inflamm world opinion," particularly in the Buddhist countries and India. Once he had escaped, Mao told his men: "Do all you can to hold the enemies in Lhasa ... so when our main force

arrives we can surround them and wipe them out.”

The Dalai Lama

The Dalai Lama is the spiritual leader of Tibet, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, an honorary citizen of Canada, and, according to a 2008 opinion survey in six European countries, he is the most respected world leader. Yet Beijing will not even allow him to visit the quake site.

The Chinese party-state has unfairly accused him of fomenting violence in Tibet. The truth is that the Dalai Lama advocates Tibetan autonomy under Chinese rule, but strongly disavows violence and does not favour secession.

Peaceful demonstrations do not disturb stability. It is the presence of thousands of armed military and police that provoke disturbances.

The Dalai Lama is, in fact, Beijing’s best chance for a peaceful resolution of the Tibet Issue. Some Tibetan groups in exile seek complete independence, rejecting his middle approach. Indeed, the Dalai Lama has expressed fears of greater violence after his death.

Jean-Louis Roy, a former president of the Canadian NGO Rights and Democracy, noted on the eve of the Dalai Lama's visit to Ottawa six years ago that:

Silence in response to any abuse of human rights is unacceptable and it is especially objectionable in response to abuses that amount to cultural genocide as in Tibet. These abuses continue to taint Canada's flourishing economic relationship with China, not to mention our reputation as a defender of human rights and democratic freedoms.

Who could disagree? All Canadian MPs should speak out now about the latest tragedy in Tibet.