

The Advisory Board of the International Association for Tibetan Studies (IATS)



Thursday 6th August 2026

To the Honorable Minister of Education of Nepal,

The 17th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies (IATS) is due to take place in Kathmandu on 23-29 August 2026. The Himalaya Centre for Asian Studies (HiCAS) and the Centre for Buddhist Studies (CBS) of Kathmandu University have kindly agreed to co-host the conference and have been preparing for this event since 2023.

On Monday 4th August, the undersigned Acting President and the Secretary General of the IATS were informed by CBS in a phone call that HiCAS and CBS were asked not to go ahead with the conference. This message had been orally conveyed to the Vice Chancellor of Kathmandu University and Prof. Sagar Sharma from HiCAS by the Chief Secretary of Nepal and the Secretary of Foreign Affairs. So far, the conveners have not received anything in writing.

The IATS Board herewith formally expresses its dismay with this unexpected development, in particular at such a short notice. The decision to organize the Seminar at KU was officially taken in 2023, with due consultation of all parties concerned. The conveners at KU and the IATS Board have regularly been in touch since then, with no indication at any point of this unexpected turn of events. In advance of the upcoming IATS Seminar in Kathmandu, all relevant parties were contacted long in advance and were regularly updated. This includes parties inside Nepal as well as outside, such as the China Tibetological Research Center. No concerns were raised from any side during the planning process in 2023-2026.

The Seminar is due to take place in Kathmandu only two weeks from now. More than 700 participants have registered and are looking forward to arriving in Kathmandu soon. They have booked their flights and hotels and paid their registration fees, which are not refundable at such short notice. Local partners (hotels, restaurants, businesses) have invested money, and considerable loss will be incurred if the conference cannot take place.

The consequences of a cancellation would also be detrimental to Tibetan and Himalayan studies, in which Nepal has so much academic expertise. It would be damaging to Kathmandu University, which would lose an important platform to showcase their strength and build new academic networks. It is also likely to cause reputational damage to Nepal through negative press coverage, and will have long-term repercussions in terms of economy, tourism, and academic collaborations.

The IATS Board cannot imagine that a cancellation of the conference can be in the interest of the Ministry of Education, which aims at fostering academic excellence. We are therefore seeking your support, so that the conference can proceed smoothly and successfully.

The IATS Board will need immediate clarity on the status of the event, since neither we nor the conveners have received anything in writing so far. Taking all these aspects into account, we do hope that the conference will go ahead; however, if this is not possible, the IATS will need an official letter from the Ministry of Education stating that KU cannot organize the conference. Without clear information in writing, we are in an impossible position towards our membership, to whom we are accountable.

After careful consideration of all options, in case the conference cannot be organized by KU in Kathmandu or Nepal, the one viable option would thus be for IATS to take over as a convener and organize the event, as per the scheduled programme. This could either be done as an in-person event, in which the IATS would take responsibility as the convener, or as an online event. Due to the last-minute nature of the decision not to allow the conference to happen, we assume that a number of participants will be in Nepal anyway and would in that case attend the conference online from Nepal, if an online event is the preferred option.

We would also expect to hear what kind of support will be offered to the conveners, who have invested a significant amount of money in this event, and the participants, who have already booked flights and hotels. Given the circumstances, it would be unreasonable to hold the conveners responsible for the financial damage.

Our International Association for Tibetan Studies, in its 47 years of existence, has organized 16 previous seminars in Asia, Europe, and North America. Those seminars have been strictly academic and have led to fruitful academic exchanges and institutional collaborations. It is important to us to provide a platform for scholars from all destinations; this includes our Chinese counterparts and colleagues, many of whom attended previous conferences.

We therefore hope that the 17th Seminar of the International Association in Kathmandu can build on the previous success and commence as planned, with your support.

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,



Françoise Robin
Acting President of the IATS



Ulrike Roesler
Secretary General of the IATS

For further information about the International Association for Tibetan Studies and the 17th Seminar of the IATS, please visit <https://www.iats.info/>