



OYUNA TSEDEVDAMBA, 2011 MONGOLIA

Member of Parliament, Government of Mongolia

“Because of my Eisenhower Fellowship I brought a dinosaur home!” shouts Oyuna Tseveddamba of her EF experience. In early spring of 2011, half dozen interviewers from the USAID office in Mongolia sat in front of her and wondered why she chose to study dinosaur parks during her Eisenhower Fellowship program. At the time, Tseveddamba was the president of The Democratic Women’s Union of Mongolia, so this task was seemingly irrelevant. To their inquiries, she responded, “Because Mongolian dinosaur heritage is under threat due to increasing mining activities and lack of public awareness.”



A few weeks later, she received news of her acceptance to Eisenhower Fellowship’s 2011 Northeast Asia Regional Program, the second one in EF history. Tseveddamba immediately began researching election financing, law enforcement offices, water quality policies, gender equality policies and, of course, dinosaurs! Of her fellowship travels, she says they were “wonderful...my notes filled two 100-page notebooks, and I had many exciting meetings. One of most exciting meetings occurred in Vernal, Utah at a visitors’ center of the National Dinosaur Park.” She introduced herself to Dan Chure, the chief paleontologist of the park as “a politician from Mongolia yearning to learn about dinosaurs”.

They bonded over their concern for Mongolia’s problem with dinosaur bone smugglers and the lack of action from the Mongolian government. Chure cleared his calendar for the day so he could further discuss these issues with Tseveddamba. She admits that at the time of their meeting, she wasn’t aware of long-time fossil smuggling crimes that were happening in Mongolia, nor was she aware of how to prevent such crimes. Tseveddamba notes, “A day in Vernal opened my eyes and fueled my interest in dinosaurs. Following that meeting I contacted a Mongolian paleontologist Bolortsetseg from New York City and collected more reading materials.”

For the six months following Tseveddamba’s fellowship travels, dinosaurs never left her mind. She continued reading on the topic in preparation for her first major article for the Mongolian public. Her article, “Dinosaurs’ Dream” appeared in a newspaper *Ardchilal* on May 17, 2012, just one day before International Museum Day. The next morning, Tseveddamba’s husband informed her that there was a *Tyrannosaurus bataar* being auctioned in the United States. With a name including “bataar” she inferred that it must be Mongolian. She followed up with Bolortsetseg to verify, and he pleaded with her to reach out to her contacts in the government to stop the auction.

Tseveddamba credits her Eisenhower Fellowship for making her possibly the only Mongolian politician who would know exactly what to do in that case. She called President Elbegdorj Tsakhia, who invited her to his office to discuss the theft issue. After their talks, President Tsakhia started his claim to request the *Tyrannosaurus bataar* be moved back to Mongolia. Since that conversation, Tseveddamba coordinated all the activities during the legal dispute and the return of the dinosaur.

This story of return of the *Tyrannosaurus bataar* (also known as *Tarbosaurs bataar*), its repatriation, and the opening of a temporary museum in the center of Mongolia’s capital in Ulaanbaatar has become major news in the world media throughout the past 12 months. And it all started with Tseveddamba’s Eisenhower Fellowship.

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