



Free Tibet and Tibet Watch Summary of the human rights situation in Tibet, 2016 – 2020

This is a summary of key human rights concerns within the entirety of Tibet between March 2016 and March 2020.¹ The task of monitoring and analysing the human rights situation in Tibet is complicated due to the concerted efforts of the ruling Chinese Communist Party to limit access to Tibet (particularly the areas of Tibet governed as the Tibet Autonomous Region, or TAR), its policies of tight censorship and close surveillance, and the decreasing number of Tibetans escaping into exile.² The examples given in this report will therefore only represent a fraction of the abuses likely to be taking place across occupied Tibet.

This submission draws on testimonies, images and videos smuggled out of Tibet that were acquired by Free Tibet's research partner, Tibet Watch. Tibet Watch uses a network of contacts within Tibet and the Tibetan diaspora to gather information on human rights abuses. To ensure accuracy at all times, all of the information that Tibet Watch receives is carefully checked and corroborated prior to publication. Sources are kept confidential by Tibet Watch to prevent reprisals against those who have given testimony or against their families and communities.

Summary of the period under review

In our previous submission, covering the years 2013 – 2016, we noted the tightening of restrictions across Tibet in the name of maintaining "stability". The aim was to ensure that there would be no repeat of the protests that swept across Tibet in March 2008, or of the self-immolation protests that started in 2009 and which peaked in 2012.

Many of these stabilisation policies were introduced under TAR Party Secretary Chen Quanguo, who between 2011 and 2016 drastically stepped up the spending on and recruitment of security personnel and imposed unprecedented surveillance measures. In 2016, Chen assumed the role of Party Secretary of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, so he could replicate these strategies on a larger scale with the Uyghur population.

The measures introduced to Tibet under Chen have remained in force, ensuring that Tibet remains inhospitable for those considering challenging the CCP, be it through a protest or by writing a weblog criticising decisions made by the Party. During this period, Free Tibet has recorded scores of arrests of Tibetan community activists, solo protesters, nomads, monks and nuns. Notable political prisoners during this period included the writer Lomig, the language advocate Tashi Wangchuk and the nomadic community leader and

¹ This submission will cover all of Tibet, which, prior the Chinese invasion and occupation in 1949, comprised three provinces: Amdo, Kham and U-Tsang. Under the Chinese occupation, the eastern half of Tibet (Amdo and eastern Kham) has been divided into units called Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures, which have been incorporated into Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan and Yunnan Provinces. The remaining western half of Tibet (western Kham and U-Tsang) is administered as the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). This submission will use Tibetan names where possible and provide the corresponding Chinese names in the footnotes.

² See, for example: Shri Puri, '97% drop in Tibetan refugees arrival to India from Tibet', *Times of India*, 17 January 2019 www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/97-drop-in-tibetan-refugees-arrival-to-india-from-tibet/articleshow/67566650.cms

anti-corruption activist A-Nya Sengdra. These are three of numerous recorded examples of Tibetans' legitimate protests or dissent resulting in charges under broadly-worded state security laws.

The repression of community activists and critics of the CCP culminated in the launch, in February 2017, of a three-year campaign against "criminal gangs" and "underworld forces", in which authorities publicly appealed for information on Tibetans carrying out a range of proscribed activities and offered cash rewards for those providing information leading to an arrest. Official figures reported in state media indicate that the campaign has led to hundreds of arrests.

Considering Tibet's relatively small population, and the difficulty in obtaining information, the number of protests and expressions of dissent in Tibet is remarkable. These protests include self-immolation protests, of which there were 13 between 2016 and 2019.³ This is a sharp drop from the years 2011-2015, when there were at least 142, and can in part be explained by new measures imposing collective punishment on the families and monastic communities of anyone who carries out a self-immolation protest. Families of self-immolation protesters who were held by police during this reporting period were sometimes coerced into giving false reasons for why their relative carried out such a protest, for example, a domestic dispute. The number of protests and their geographically spread gives lie to the notion, routinely repeated in CCP statements, that Tibetans are happy under Chinese rule.

At the same time, Tibet's unique culture, encompassing its religion, customs and language came under repeated attacks from government authorities. A raft of restrictions was introduced to make Tibetan Buddhism compatible with Xi Jinping's vision of "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics". In practice, this has meant limiting the influence of Tibetan Buddhism in community life and the deification of the Party leadership. Large Buddhist communities such as Larung Gar and Yarchen Gar were brought under tighter CCP control and were subjected to campaigns of mass forced removals and housing demolitions. The teaching of the Tibetan language was further compromised with restrictions on monasteries providing language classes.

Crackdowns on peaceful protests and dissent

Freedom of expression, assembly and association have long been heavily policed in Tibet. During this period, Tibetans continued to be beaten, arrested and detained for protesting against the occupation or the CCP's activities in Tibet. Many of those arrested were Tibetans carrying out spontaneous individual protests, a form of protest indicative of Tibetans' inability to gather in large groups or organise due to the extensive security and surveillance infrastructure across Tibet.

In December 2016, **Tenpa**, an 18-year-old monk, was seized by 10 Chinese police officers during a solo protest. He marched through the main street in Ngaba, eastern Tibet⁴, carrying a Tibetan flag and a picture of the Dalai Lama while shouting slogans calling for freedom and the Dalai Lama's return to Tibet and for freedom in Tibet. He was seized five minutes into his protest.⁵ **Dugbey**, a caretaker and mother of two, was arrested in March 2017 after she staged a solo protest in Rari Township, Ngaba. She was held in an unknown location following her arrest.⁶ **Lodoe Gyatso** was arrested in January 2018 after he released a video online in which he called for a free Tibet and world peace before protesting outside the Potala Palace in Lhasa. He was held in detention until his secret trial in either September or October 2018, where he was sentenced to 18 years in prison.⁷

³ Self-immolation protests in Tibet <https://freetibet.org/about/self-immolation-protests>

⁴ Ngaba (Ch: Aba) County, Ngaba (Ch: Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture), Amdo (Ch: Sichuan Province)

⁵ Information supplied by Tibet Watch (henceforth: *Tibet Watch*), January 2017

⁶ *Tibet Watch*, March 2017

⁷ *Tibet Watch*, April 2019

Six Tibetans - **Tsegyal, Yangphel, Dudul Lhagyay, Norsang, Shewang Namgyal** and **Sithar Wangyal** - were arrested in Tarchen Township, Nagchu, central Tibet⁸ on 20 September 2019 after refusing to take part in official events to mark the 70th anniversary of the People's Republic of China.⁹

Tibetans were also arrested for online or written dissent. **Sonam**, a master's degree student at Minzu University in Lanzhou City, was arrested in 2019 after he wrote an essay for his civil service entrance exam that criticised the falling number of government job opportunities for Tibetans. His work was posted to social media and went viral on a range of platforms including WeChat.¹⁰ The Tibetan writer Jo Lobsang Jamyang, also known by his pen name **Lomig**, and whose case was mentioned in our previous submission, was sentenced to seven and a half years in prison on 9 May 2016. He was found guilty of "sharing government secrets and attempting to divide the nation" in a closed trial in Chengdu, over a year after his arrest in April 2015. Lomig's family were allowed to visit him for half an hour in his detention centre before his trial.¹¹

In addition to the clampdown on protests, police and security forces also targeted Tibetans who expressed their Tibetan identity in a way that displeased authorities, for example, by suggesting that Tibet is culturally distinct from China. Images of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan flag, both of which are integral to Tibet's unique culture, are banned. In March 2017, **Gendun**, from Sersshul County in Kardze,¹² was severely beaten and arrested for sharing pictures of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan national flag on WeChat.¹³ **Wangchuk** was detained in Zurtso Township in Shigatse, central Tibet¹⁴ on 8 March 2019, and held in an unknown location. Local sources say he was arrested after sharing books on WeChat, specifically the Dalai Lama's teachings and the Tibetan translation of '*The Noodle maker of Kalimpong*', a book by the Dalai Lama's elder brother. Following his arrest, Wangchuk's family were harassed by authorities, who imposed surveillance measure on them and restrictions on their freedom of movement. The family's welfare benefits, including subsidies and old-age insurance, were also cut.¹⁵

Treatment of Tibetans in detention

Tibetans arrested for the above activities are invariably charged with state security crimes such as "splittism", "inciting separatism" or "sharing state secrets". Under the Chinese Criminal Procedure Law, those accused of state security crimes have no right to a lawyer or an open trial and can be detained for indefinite periods of time in an undisclosed location. The accusation of state security crimes also means that family members of the accused do not have to be notified about the detention. Evidence collected during the investigation process for criminal cases related to state secrecy is kept undisclosed, complicating any attempts for Tibetans to seek redress. Tibetans held in these secretive and uncertain conditions are at risk of torture and ill-treatment.¹⁶ Despite the PRC's Criminal Procedure Law setting out a clear prohibition on the use of torture, and Article 18 of this law explicitly describing torture as a "crime" that should be investigated, there continues to be no evidence that a single case of torture in Tibet has been investigated or the perpetrators held accountable.

⁸ Nagchu (Ch: Nagqu), Ü-Tsang (Ch: TAR)

⁹ *Tibet Watch*, September 2019

¹⁰ *Tibet Watch*, May 2019

¹¹ *Tibet Watch*, May 2016; 'Tibetan Monk and Writer Sentenced to Prison Term', *Radio Free Asia*, 9 May 2016

www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/tibetan-monk-and-writer-05092016160254.html/

¹² Sersshul (Ch: Sêrxü) County, Kardze (Ch: Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture), Kham (Ch: Sichuan Province)

¹³ *Tibet Watch*, March 2017

¹⁴ Shigatse (Ch: Xigazê), Ü-Tsang (Ch: TAR)

¹⁵ *Tibet Watch*, November 2019

¹⁶ For further examples, see Tibet Watch's 2015 report *Blood on the Snows* (<http://tibetwatch.org/blood-on-the-snows.pdf>), which compiles testimonies from Tibetan refugees of their the treatment in detention and prison.

On 11 March 2016, **Tashi**, a Tibetan man in his thirties, committed suicide in a police detention centre in Markham County.¹⁷ During his time in detention he was severely beaten and tortured which, according to Tibetan exile sources, was so unbearable he committed suicide.¹⁸ On 20 June 2016, **Yudrug Nyima**, from Derge County in Kardze¹⁹ died after being severely beaten in police custody. Yudrug Nyima was apprehended earlier that day after police claimed that he had a gun in his possession.²⁰ **Lobsang Dhargay**, a monk from Kirti Monastery, was arrested on 16 March 2017 at the scene of a solo protest in Ngaba. He was detained in an army camp in Ngaba County, where he was severely beaten and torture, leaving him in critical condition.²¹

There were several recorded cases of Tibetans having necessary medical treatment withheld in prison and continuing to be denied such treatment following their release. In some cases, this directly resulted in deaths.

Gendun Sherab, a monk from Sog County, central Tibet,²² died on 18 April 2020. He was arrested in Lhasa in 2017 after sharing a message from the Dalai Lama on the messaging application WeChat. He spent three months in prison, during which time he was severely beaten. Following his release, he was blacklisted from accessing various health facilities in Lhasa, depriving him of the medication he needed. This reportedly prompted him to return to his home in Sog County to seek out traditional Tibetan medicine.²³

Choekyi, a monk from Phugu Monastery in Serthar County,²⁴ died in May 2020 from a longstanding illness. He was arrested and imprisoned in June 2015 after he was caught making a special garment for the Dalai Lama's 80th birthday. He was known to have been in poor health before his arrest, and was subjected to brutal treatment and hard labour in prison, damaging his liver and kidney. Prison authorities refused to grant any medical consultation or treatment. Following his release in January 2019, he was not allowed to go to Lhasa to see a doctor of his choice and was also stopped from consulting doctors Chengdu. He died on the afternoon of 7 May, aged 43.²⁵

Crackdown on "criminal gangs"

One of the most significant developments during this reporting period has been the launch of campaigns across Tibet to identify and neutralise what authorities refer to as "criminal gangs" and "underworld forces". The CCP Central Committee and CCP State Council announced the three-year campaign on 24 January 2018. This was followed by a notification issued on 7 February 2018 by the TAR Public Security Bureau, outlining the threats posed to the economy and to society by "underworld forces" and providing 22 examples of organised crimes. Some of the examples could be identified as legitimate offences (e.g. the crimes of extortion and blackmail, destruction of property and prostitution). However, these were juxtaposed with crimes that by their inclusion appeared to be targeting Tibetans who carried out peaceful advocacy for environmental protection and other activities that are integral to Tibetans' religion and culture. It also included offences that more generally contravened Tibetans' rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly and their right to cultural life. Examples included "using religion to control, to confuse, to incite, or coerce the masses to resist the Party and government" and "instilling the masses with reactionary ideology and narrow nationalism, such

¹⁷ Markham (Ch: Mangkang) County, Chamdo (Ch: Changdu), Kham (Ch: TAR)

¹⁸ 'Tibetan man kills self in detention to avoid custodial torture', *Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy*, 6 April 2016 www.tchrd.org/tibetan-man-kills-self-in-detention-to-avoid-custodial-torture/

¹⁹ Derge County (Ch: Dêgê County), Kardze (Ch: Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture), Kham (Ch: Sichuan Province)

²⁰ *Tibet Watch*, July 2016

²¹ *Tibet Watch*, March 2017

²² Sog (Ch: Suo) County, Nagchu (Ch: Nagqu), Ü-Tsang (Ch: TAR)

²³ *Tibet Watch*, April 2020

²⁴ Serthar (Ch: Seda) County, Kardze (Ch: Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture), Kham (Ch: Sichuan Province)

²⁵ *Tibet Watch*, May 2020

as the “Middle Way.”²⁶ Throughout 2018, further notifications of this kind were issued across all of Tibet by provincial and county authorities, Public Security Bureaus and county courts.²⁷

Information from official sources or information that was smuggled out Tibet suggested that at least 400 Tibetans had been arrested under this campaign by the end of 2019. This is likely to be a conservative estimate; in January 2019, the TAR High People's Court compiled a report stating that in 2018, 385 people in the TAR alone had been found guilty of organised crimes, endangering national security and separatism. In the vast majority of cases, the identities, charges and current location and status of those arrested have not been disclosed. However, cases where Tibet researchers have obtained information demonstrate that those figures include Tibetans who were targeted for their community activism.

On 4 September 2018, **A-Nya Sengdra**, a prominent Tibetan activist, was arrested in Gade County.²⁸ A-Nya Sengdra is a well-known advocate against corruption and for the rights of Tibetan nomads. He was held without charge until August 2019 and stood trial in December 2019, where he was found guilty of “provoking trouble” and “organising a mob to disturb social order” and sentenced to seven years in prison.²⁹

Between 10 and 14 April 2019, nine Tibetans in Rebkong County³⁰ were sentenced to prison terms ranging between three and seven years for “organised crime, extortion and assembling a mob to disturb social order”. The court ruled that they had created an “illegal organisation”, “maliciously obstructed the government’s land acquisition work and construction operations” and “committed serious crimes that constitute a crime of gathering people to disturb social order.”³¹ According to information obtained by the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, the arrests followed a long-running campaign by villagers to reclaim community land expropriated by the local government for a failed business enterprise.³²

Crackdowns related to COVID-19

The CCP’s sluggish response to the outbreak of COVID-19 and its prioritisation of shutting down bad news or criticism was replicated in Tibet. Tibet has seen very few reported cases of COVID-19, with official media claiming that only one case was detected in Lhasa. Lockdown measures were introduced in February 2020. They were accompanied by broadly-worded notifications from authorities warning Tibetans against spreading “rumours” or “misinformation”, or criticising the CCP and its response.

Seven Tibetans were arrested in Chamdo, central Tibet, in February on suspicion of spreading rumours or misinformation about the virus. They included, Tse, a Tibetan man who messaged contacts on WeChat to recite a particular prayer in the hope that it would ward off the virus.³³ That same month, three Tibetans were detained for between five and 10 days and fined 500 yuan for spreading “rumours” about the coronavirus, in

²⁶ 'Notice of the Tibet Autonomous Region Public Security Department on Reporting Leads on Crimes and Violations by Underworld Forces', 7 February 2018, cited in “Illegal Organizations’: China’s Crackdown on Tibetan Social Groups”, *Human Rights Watch*, 30 July 2018 www.hrw.org/report/2018/07/30/illegal-organizations/chinas-crackdown-tibetan-social-groups

²⁷ For a full timeline and further analysis of the campaign, see: 'The effects of China’s campaign against ‘organised crime’ in Tibet, 2018-2019 A UN Special Procedures Briefing’, *Tibet Advocacy Coalition and Free Tibet*, September 2019 www.freetibet.org/files/Organised%20crime%20in%20Tibet%2C%20September%202019%2C%20HRC42%2C%20Tibet%20Advocacy%20Coalition.pdf

²⁸ Gade (Ch: Gande) County, Golog (Ch: Guoluo Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture), Amdo (Ch: Qinghai Province)

²⁹ *Tibet Watch*, December 2019

³⁰ Rebkong (Ch: Tongren) County, Malho (Ch: Huangnan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture), Amdo (Ch: Qinghai Province)

³¹ *Tibet Watch*, April 2019

³² 'Nine Tibetans sentenced up to 7 years in prison under China’s organised crime crackdown', *Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy*, 19 April 2019 <https://tchrd.org/nine-tibetans-sentenced-up-to-7-years-in-prison-under-chinas-organised-crime-crackdown/>

³³ *Tibet Watch*, February 2020 ; 'Seven Detained in Tibet For ‘Spreading Rumors’ on the Coronavirus Threat', *Radio Free Asia*, 10 February 2020 www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/rumors-02102020164759.html

Mangra County, eastern Tibet³⁴. They were also forced to undergo Chinese legal education training. On 12 March, 10 Tibetans were arrested for breaching control measures in Lhasa.³⁵

Police officers and grid workers were mobilised in early March to digitally search WeChat groups in around 16 villages and five monasteries within the townships of Tharshul and Sumdo in Mangra County. Authorities shut down 75 WeChat groups across the two townships, while 223 WeChat groups were forced to submit letters pledging they would be properly administered and would not spread 'rumours'.³⁶

By mid-March the lockdown measures across all of Tibet was eased with monasteries and shops reopening. The surveillance measures are certain to remain. Free Tibet and Tibet Watch continue to monitor the COVID-19. Testimonies from several Tibetans stated that they fearful of a second wave of COVID-19 cases due to the rush to end the lockdown and the return of mass tourism.³⁷

Restrictions on the right to freedom of religion

The majority of Tibetans practice Tibetan Buddhism, a religion that the CCP has in the past vigorously repressed and continues to view as an obstacle to fully incorporating Tibet into China. Tibetans are permitted to practice their faith but only within tight boundaries prescribed by the state. Under Xi Jinping, China maintains a policy of "Sinicising religion", mandating strong state intervention in the affairs of Tibet's monasteries and nunneries to ensure that they are loyal to the CCP and to one unified China. The CCP TAR Committee has imposed rules that all monasteries must fly Chinese flags and hang portraits of CCP leaders on their premises. The CCP has been proactive in trying to coerce Tibetans into renouncing any allegiance to the 14th and current Dalai Lama, outlawing his portraits, recordings or travel outside the People's Republic of China to attend his teachings. Responsibilities historically carried out by senior monks and nuns are now overseen in every monastery in the TAR and the majority in the rest of Tibet by Monastery Management Committees and Monastic Government Working Groups. These bodies are composed of CCP members and government officials, along with government-approved monks.³⁸

Following the 2017 CCP National Congress, in which President Xi stated that religion must be brought under greater Party control, more than 20,000 party members were dispatched to villages across TAR to educate locals about these new government policies. A further 7,000 party members and government officials were permanently stationed in monasteries across the TAR, tasked with spreading the message to the resident monks and nuns.³⁹ CCP officials inspected monasteries to ensure religious activities were in line with religious laws and in harmony with "socialism with Chinese characteristics".⁴⁰ The United Front Work Department (UFWD) assumed the responsibility for overseeing religious affairs from the State Administration for Religious Affairs in March 2018, a move interpreted by China experts as bringing religion under greater direct CCP control.⁴¹ The UFWD set legal exams that residents of monasteries were required to undertake, including

³⁴ Mangra County, Tsolho (Ch: Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture), Amdo (Ch: Qinghai Province)

³⁵ *Tibet Watch*, March 2020

³⁶ *Tibet Watch*, March 2020

³⁷ 'Chinese government relaxes the coronavirus lockdown in Tibet', *Free Tibet*, 1 April 2020 www.freetibet.org/news-media/na/chinese-government-relaxes-coronavirus-lockdown-tibet, Information supplied by Tibet Watch, March 2020

³⁸ Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2018: Tibet, *US Department of State*, 2018, available at <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/china-includes-tibet-xinjiang-hong-kong-and-macau/tibet/>

³⁹ 'China trains Tibetan monks and nuns to train fellow-monastics to be loyal subjects', *Tibetan Review*, 6 June 2018 www.tibetanreview.net/china-trains-tibetan-monks-and-nuns-to-train-fellow-monastics-to-be-loyal-subjects/

⁴⁰ *Tibet Watch*, July 2018

⁴¹ 'The Communist Party's Crackdown on Religion in China', *Congressional-Executive Commission on China*, 28 November 2018 www.cecc.gov/events/hearings/the-communist-party-s-crackdown-on-religion-in-china; Alex Joske, 'Reorganizing the United Front Work Department: New Structures for a New Era of Diaspora and Religious Affairs Work', *China Brief*, Volume 19 Issue 9

questions on Marxism, the newly revised constitution of the PRC and "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era".⁴²

In 2018, the "Four Standards" policy was introduced across the TAR. The policy required monks and nuns to actively participate in dissuading others from protesting, calling on them to demonstrate "political reliability," "moral integrity capable of impressing the public," and willingness to "play an active role at critical moments."⁴³

CCP authorities across Tibet have also issued orders effectively designed to limit the influence of monasteries on their local communities. In May 2018, Chinese authorities in Lithang County⁴⁴ issued orders that saw several senior monks evicted from the local monastery and prohibited from teaching in the surrounding areas. Families who had previously sent their children to the monastery to study also faced pressure from local authorities to withdraw them, despite the limited resources in local schools.⁴⁵

That same month, the TAR's Education Affairs Committee, Municipal People's Government, and Municipal Education Bureau issued an order that forbade parents from taking their children to monasteries or allowing them to participate in religious activities during the month of Saga Dawa.⁴⁶ A five-point notification acquired by Tibet Watch from the Second Kindergarten School in Chamdo City in the TAR stated that the restrictions were being imposed to promote children's "ideological education", and that officials were responsible for penalising individuals or families found to be in contravention of these restrictions.⁴⁷

In December 2018, Tibetan children were prohibited from attending language classes in monasteries in Nangchen County, eastern Tibet⁴⁸, according to a local government notice, which warned that holding classes in the monasteries was a danger that would be "dealt with."⁴⁹

Regulations also intruded on Tibetan homes. Following a meeting of the People's Congress of the Tibetan Autonomous Region in January 2019, authorities ordered Tibetans to put shrines to Xi Jinping and Communist Party leaders inside their homes, replacing altars to religious figures such as holy lamas. This was initially required of Tibetans dependent on government subsidies or the poverty alleviation programme. They were told that their aid would stop if they failed to replace the images.⁵⁰ This policy was expanded to other families not on government subsidies in 2020.⁵¹ As part of the programme, villagers across Tibet were assembled and presented with images of party leaders for them to hang on their walls or altars. Images were also distributed to be hung in schools, monasteries and offices. Testimonies from Dzoge County⁵² stated that authorities are inspecting households to this order has been carried out.⁵³

www.jamestown.org/program/reorganizing-the-united-front-work-department-new-structures-for-a-new-era-of-diaspora-and-religious-affairs-work The UFDW also took control of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission, although unlike SARA, this body has not been dissolved.

⁴² *Tibet Watch*, June 2018

⁴³ 'China: New Political Requirements for Tibetan Monastics', *Human Rights Watch*, 30 October 2108

www.hrw.org/news/2018/10/31/china-new-political-requirements-tibetan-monastics

⁴⁴ Lithang (Ch: Litang) County, Kardze (Ch: Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture), Kham (Ch: Sichuan Province)

⁴⁵ *Tibet Watch*, May 2018

⁴⁶ Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2018: Tibet, *US Department of State*, 2018, available at

<https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/china-includes-tibet-xinjiang-hong-kong-and-macau/tibet/>

⁴⁷ *Tibet Watch*, May 2018

⁴⁸ Nangchen (Ch: Nangqên) County, Yulshul (Ch: Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture), Kham (Ch: Qinghai Province)

⁴⁹ *Tibet Watch*, February 2019

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Tibet Watch*, March 2020

⁵² Dzoge (Ch: Zoige) County, Ngaba (Ch: Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture), Amdo (Ch: Sichuan Province)

⁵³ *Tibet Watch*, April 2020

Dalai Lama During this period, senior CCP officials continued to assert that they would take charge of the succession process when the time comes to identify the next Dalai Lama. In the United States, several senators have responded by sponsoring the Tibetan Policy and Support Act of 2019, which reaffirms US support for Tibetans to be able to identify the next Dalai Lama without interference or coercion from China. It also states that Chinese officials responsible for such interference would be in violation of Tibetans' rights to freedom of religion and would be open for sanctions under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act.⁵⁴

The 11th Panchen Lama, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, remains missing along with his family following their abduction in 1995. In 2019, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima turned 30, with no news about his location or well-being. 17 May 2020 marked a quarter of a century since his disappearance. The CCP issued a brief statement claiming that he had completed his studies and was now working, but did not elaborate further, and at the time of this report had not responded to US requests for a meeting with Gedhun Choekyi Nyima.⁵⁵

Larung Gar and Yarchen Gar

Two key examples of the CCP's treatment of Tibetan Buddhism have been the campaigns to overhaul the Buddhist communities of Larung Gar, located in Serthar County, and Yarchen Gar, in Palyul County in eastern Tibet⁵⁶. Both sites were established in the 1980s and in the ensuing years grew in size and influence. Chinese authorities interfered in the affairs of both communities on several occasions during the 1990s and 2000s, including forcible evictions of large numbers of residents and demolishing homes. This state interference was drastically escalated in Larung Gar and Yarchen Gar during this reporting period.

Between July 2016 and by May 2017, 4,828 residents were removed from Larung Gar and 4,725 buildings demolished. The official reason given for the demolitions was that it would make Larung Gar safer for residents by reducing overcrowding and the risk of fire. Despite this explanation, residents were offered no prior consultation about the plans. Furthermore, the removals were accompanied by numerous repressive measures, including restrictions on residents' freedom of religion. Screening procedures were installed, requiring residents to show ID cards proving that they lived at the site.⁵⁷ In the autumns of 2016, 2017 and 2018, residents were issued with orders not to gather to observe the Dechen Shingdrup festival and were instead required to mark the event alone in their residences. The stated pretext was that large gatherings were unsafe while construction work was taking place.⁵⁸ It is unclear whether this prohibition was renewed in 2019.

Those who were removed were required to sign documents stating that they would not return to Larung Gar. They were then driven by coach to their native regions of Tibet, which for some residents included locations such as Lhasa, over 1,700 kilometres away. These former residents were not permitted to join new monasteries and nunneries upon returning to their native regions, and in at least some cases were subjected to patriotic re-education or humiliating performances in which they would have to dance in front of an audience of party members in their religious robes or sing Chinese patriotic songs.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ H.R.4331 - Tibetan Policy and Support Act of 2019, sections 3.a.7; 3.c. www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/4331/text?format=txt&r=3&s=1

⁵⁵ 'A 6-Year-Old Chosen as Tibetan Buddhism's Panchen Lama Vanished 25 Years Ago. China Says He's Now a College Grad, Living 'Normal Life'', *Time*, 20 May 2020 www.time.com/5839406/missing-panchen-lama-college-grad/; 'Pompeo demands China reveal whereabouts of Tibet's Panchen Lama', *Al Jazeera*, 19 May 2020 www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/05/pompeo-demands-china-reveal-whereabouts-tibet-panchen-lama-200519074745758.html

⁵⁶ Palyul (Ch: Baiyü) County, Kardze (Ch: Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture), Kham (Ch: Sichuan Province)

⁵⁷ *Tibet Watch*, December 2017

⁵⁸ *Tibet Watch*, November 2016, November 2017, October 2018

⁵⁹ *Tibet Watch*, November 2016; 'Destroying Heaven: China's campaign of destruction at Larung Gar', *Free Tibet and Tibet Watch*, October 2017 www.freelibet.org/files/Larung%20Gar%20report-web.pdf, p.9

Three nuns from Larung Gar took their lives in protest against the demolitions in the summer of 2016.⁶⁰ In February 2017, six UN special rapporteurs contacted the Chinese government to express their concern at the harm the demolitions, removals and other restrictions had caused to Larung Gar and its residents, noting that China's actions violated the residents' rights to an adequate standard of living and right to take part in cultural life.⁶¹

Similar measures were imposed on Yarchen Gar during this period. In 2018, 3,500 homes were torn down under the pretext of creating new roads through Yarchen Gar and widening existing roads. Residents were instructed to dismantle their houses themselves.⁶² In the summer of 2019, another large wave of housing demolitions was carried out. Satellite images commissioned by Free Tibet showed that just under half of the western side of the site, where Yarchen Gar's nuns live, had been levelled.⁶³ A checkpoint has been installed on the road to the site along with numerous security cameras while security forces have been deployed inside the site reportedly to monitor residents.⁶⁴

Local sources stated that around 7,000 people were forcibly removed from Yarchen Gar in 2019.⁶⁵ Testimonies smuggled out of Tibet stated that at least some of the residents who were removed in 2019 were held in internment facilities and subjected to patriotic re-education before being released. One nun took her life after she was returned to such a facility for continuing to protest against her removal.⁶⁶

A parallel development at Larung Gar and Yarchen Gar during these demolition campaigns was the construction of tourist infrastructure, including hotels, shops, car and coach parks and paved and widened roads. Free Tibet obtained testimonies from a visitor to Larung Gar, who confirmed that they were able to gain access to the site by simply presenting a Chinese ID at the checkpoint, and that they could move around freely once there, despite ongoing building work and the prohibitions on residents gathering for religious ceremonies.⁶⁷ The number of tourists now visiting Larung Gar was hinted at in a notification from Serthar County Tourism Office on 26 April, which temporarily limited visitors to Larung Gar to 1,000 people per day for the following three weeks.⁶⁸

Forced removals

Between 2018 and 2019, around 400 Tibetan families from Gonjo County⁶⁹ and Markham County in Chamdo, were relocated to counties in Shannan and Lhasa under the pretext of "poverty alleviation"⁷⁰. Around 200 families initially relocated, with sources confirming that local authorities made promises of compensation, jobs and happiness in their new environment. A further 200 families were coerced into relocating, leaving some

⁶⁰ 'Destroying Heaven: China's campaign of destruction at Larung Gar', *Free Tibet and Tibet Watch*, October 2017 www.freetibet.org/files/Larung%20Gar%20report-web.pdf, p.11

⁶¹ U.N. Special Rapporteurs on Cultural Rights, Human Rights and the Environment, the Right to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly, Adequate Housing, Minority Issues, and Freedom of Religion or Belief, Joint Statement concerning severe restrictions of religious freedom in Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, AL CHN 10/2016 (Nov. 7, 2016)

<https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=22816>

⁶² *Tibet Watch*, August 2017

⁶³ 'China has destroyed large areas of one of Tibet's biggest Buddhist sites, satellite images reveal', *Free Tibet*, 30 September 2019

www.freetibet.org/news-media/na/china-has-destroyed-large-areas-one-tibets-biggest-buddhist-sites-satellite-images

⁶⁴ Interview between Free Tibet and a visitor to Yarchen Gar on 26 June 2019. Interview carried out October 2019.

⁶⁵ 'Yarchen Gar Demolition Has Displaced As Many as 6,000 Monks and Nuns', *Radio Free Asia*, 1 October 2019

www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/yachen-demolition-10012019181505.html

⁶⁶ 'Tibetan Nun Expelled From Buddhist Center Commits Suicide in Internment Camp', *Radio Free Asia*, 14 February 2020

www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/nun-02142020172455.html

⁶⁷ 'Destroying Heaven: China's campaign of destruction at Larung Gar', *Free Tibet and Tibet Watch*, October 2017

www.freetibet.org/files/Larung%20Gar%20report-web.pdf, p.13

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.14

⁶⁹ Gonjo (Ch: Gongjue) County, Chamdo (Ch: Changdu Prefecture), Kham (Ch: TAR)

⁷⁰ *Tibet Watch*, May 2020

villages empty. The pretext for the relocations appeared to be that the land is rich in natural resources and caterpillar fungus, which is huge in demand for its medicinal value. Despite initial promises, the villagers were not compensated.⁷¹

In April 2020, villagers in Rebkong, eastern Tibet, were notified that their land would be confiscated to allow for the construction of the Xining-Chengdu express railway. The notification stated that activities in the notified area such as farming or any construction would annul any right to compensation. There is no evidence of the villagers being granted their right to free, prior, informed consent.⁷²

Language and culture

Tibetans continue to be marginalised as a result of the exclusive use of Mandarin in several key areas of governance and education. This is despite Tibetan being an official language in the TAR, Article 4 of the Chinese Constitution expressly protecting minority⁷³ language rights, and China's Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law stating that schools and other educational institutions should use appropriate "minority nationalities" languages where such languages are spoken by the majority of students. Mandarin is the official language for communications, the predominant language of instruction in public schools in many Tibetan areas and is used in courses for jobs that require technical skills and qualifications. State institutions, banks and hospitals frequently lack Tibetan language signage and forms and documents are often only in Mandarin. There is limited access to Tibetan language instruction and textbooks throughout Tibet's primary, middle, high schools and colleges. The lack of Tibetan education opportunities for Tibetan children in state schools is exacerbated by the closure of Tibetan classes in monasteries, as detailed in the above section on religious freedom.

The absence of Tibetan language resources in key areas of society such as the justice system has led to Tibetans being excluded from key areas of everyday life. In January 2018, 180 Tibetans petitioned the People's Supreme Court of China to raise concerns over the absence of Tibetan language on the official websites of people's courts in autonomous prefectures. They argued that the lack of Tibetan text left those who did not know Chinese unable to read court announcements and communications, or understand the legal rights and protections available to them.⁷⁴

Tashi Wangchuk, a businessman and language advocate from Kyegundo County in eastern Tibet⁷⁵, was arrested in January 2016 after carrying out an interview with the *New York Times* about his attempts to ensure that all Tibetan children had access to Tibetan language classes in their schools. Tashi Wangchuk repeatedly made it clear that his language advocacy was non-political, but was nevertheless charged with the state security crime "inciting separatism", tortured and held for two years without trial. He finally stood trial in January 2018 and in May was sentenced to five years in prison.⁷⁶

China underwent its review by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in 2018. In its concluding report, the Committee expressed concern at information it has received that Tibetan language teaching in schools in the TAR was not on "equal footing in law, policy and practice with Chinese",

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² *Tibet Watch*, April 2020

⁷³ Although the use of the term "minority rights" is useful in terms of reminding China of its obligations under international human rights standards and its own constitution, many Tibetans reject the term minority and prefer to be recognised and referred to as an occupied people.

⁷⁴ *Tibet Watch*, January 2018

⁷⁵ Kyekundo County (Ch: Yushu City), Yulshul (Ch: Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture), Kham (Ch: Qinghai Province)

⁷⁶ 'Tibet activist jailed in China over language campaign', *BBC News* (May 2018), available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-44207981>

restrictions on the Tibetan languages, the punishment of Tibetan language advocacy and at the lack of access to Tibetan language translations during court proceedings.⁷⁷

On 11 January 2020, the 11th People's Congress of the TAR adopted "Regulations on the Establishment of a Model Area for Ethnic Unity and Progress in the Tibet Autonomous Region", more widely known as the Ethnic Unity Law. The stated aim of the law, established in Article 3, is "safeguarding oneness of the motherland, strengthening ethnic unity, and taking an unambiguous stand against separatism are common responsibilities of all people from all ethnic groups."⁷⁸ The regulations contain a series of punitive measures, targeting individuals found to be undermining ethnic unity by 'spreading rumours', 'producing information' or 'holding a stubborn or determined attitude'.⁷⁹ The law came into effect on 1 May 2020.

Restrictions on freedom of movement and freedom to leave one's own country

Tibetans continue to be subject to tight restrictions on movement within the TAR. It is effectively impossible for Tibetans in the TAR to acquire passports for foreign travel. Authorities confiscate passports from Tibetans that have family or community links to dissidents and individuals that have carried out self-immolation protests.⁸⁰

Tibetans living in other parts of Tibet and who have travelled to northern India to attend teachings by the Dalai Lama such as the Kalachakra, have been threatened with collective punishment for them and their families, forcing them to return home.⁸¹ Political prisoners are frequently subjected to restrictions on their movement and ability to communicate after their release, including being prevented from possessing a phone, having to register with authorities before travelling and being banned from travelling to the TAR.

Tashi Choeyang, a monk who had been living in India, went missing in November 2016 after returning to see his family. He had obtained a visa from the Chinese embassy in Delhi. His family received no information about his whereabouts until 2017 when a released prisoner informed them he was being held in Dartsedo Prison in Kardze and serving a six-year prison sentence.⁸²

An extensive network of checkpoints across Tibet impedes Tibetans' freedom of movement and allows authorities to monitor them. In February 2017, pilgrims from Tibetan areas in Gansu Province were prevented from entering Ngaba (which is governed as part of Sichuan Province) to attend a prayer festival at Kirti Monastery.⁸³ Lhasa in particular has become very difficult for Tibetans to visit since it requires numerous permits to be obtained at village and county level.⁸⁴ In March 2018, Tibetans embarking on a devotional trek to Lhasa from Lhagong and Dartsedo in Kardze were fined 3000 yuan per day and in some cases detained.⁸⁵

⁷⁷ Concluding observations on the combined fourteenth to seventeenth periodic reports of China (including Hong Kong, China and Macao, China), CERD, 30 August 2018 https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/CHN/CERD_C_CHN_CO_14-17_32237_E.pdf para 48

⁷⁸ 'China's 'ethnic unity' law further undermines Tibetan identity language and culture', *Tibet Post International*, 1 May 2020 www.thetibetpost.com/en/news/tibet/6754-china-s-'ethnic-unity'-law-further-undermines-tibetan-identity-language-and-culture

⁷⁹ 'New regulations on ethnic unity officially depart from preferential ethnic policies, threaten Tibetan culture and violate international human rights norms', *International Campaign for Tibet*, February 2020, p.4

<https://secureservercdn.net/198.71.233.163/4vo.170.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/02112020-ethnic-unity.pdf>

⁸⁰ 'A policy alienating Tibetans': The denial of passports to Tibetans as China intensifies control', *International Campaign for Tibet*, July 2015, p.2 <http://www.savetibet.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/A-policy-alienating-Tibetans.pdf>

⁸¹ *Tibet Watch*, January 2017, January 2019

⁸² *Tibet Watch*, February 2018

⁸³ *Tibet Watch*, February 2017

⁸⁴ 'Information on Tibet for consideration by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination for the List of Themes in Advance of the Review of the People's Republic of China', *Tibet Advocacy Coalition*, June 2018, para 20; footnote 15

www.tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/CHN/INT_CERD_NGO_CHN_31600_E.pdf

⁸⁵ *Tibet Watch*, March 2018

Conclusion

The CCP has introduced massive changes to Tibet in the past five years, from forcibly relocating Tibetans from their pastures or religious communities to tightening security to clamping down on religion, Tibetan culture and the use of the Tibetan language. These actions have repeatedly been hailed in state media as bringing stability to Tibet and alleviating poverty. What is less commonly heard are the voices of the Tibetans affected by these policies. The sharp drop in Tibetan refugees, the restrictions on communications and the policy of keeping the TAR's borders tightly closed are ways of keeping the world from hearing these voices. It allows Beijing to speak on Tibetans' behalf and assert that they are happy.

All the evidence available in Tibet suggests the very opposite is true; protests are widespread, despite each one being against the odds and carrying the risk of severe punishment. The flow of testimonies and images of human rights abuses in Tibet is steady, despite tight censorship and surveillance.

The facts laid out in this report are the product of numerous Tibetans risking their personal safety to send information out of the country in the hope that the international community might act on it. The United Kingdom and other democratic countries that have trade relations with China should be proactive in seeking out these voices, learning from them and following the precedent of the Tibetan Policy and Support Act. By doing this, they would restore their relations with China to a more level footing and would truly be putting human rights at the forefront of its foreign policy.

Recommendations to the British government

The British government, through all available channels, should ask China to:

- Publicly disclose the location of all Tibetan political prisoners that it is currently holding and the reasons for their detention. Any prisoners that are being held either without charge or without charge for an internationally recognised offence should be immediately and unconditionally released.
- Ensure that it is not carrying out torture or other ill-treatment in its prisons. Any allegations of torture should be investigated and those found culpable should be held accountable.
- Ensure that all prisoners held in Tibet are granted access to lawyers, medical treatment and contact with family members.
- Rescind all measures that impose collective punishments on Tibetans.
- Allow Tibetans to peacefully exercise their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly without fear of arbitrary detention or excessive use of force by police or security services. Furthermore, ensure that police and security personnel that employ excessive force are held to account through prompt, independent and impartial investigations and appropriate disciplinary measures.
- Lift all restrictions on freedom of movement and permit Tibetans to freely move around Tibet, to leave the country and to access passports without undue restrictions.
- Implement all the recommendations that China accepted at its Universal Periodic Review at the Human Rights Council in 2018, and recommendations issued by the Committee Against Torture in 2015 and by the Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in 2018.
- Ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and honour all commitments arising from the Covenant in full.
- Agree to specific dates for a visit by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, including unrestricted access to Tibet.

The British government should also, publicly and at ministerial level:

- Explicitly support the right of Tibetans to free speech, including those peacefully expressing their opposition to Chinese rule in Tibet.
- Explicitly support full religious freedom throughout China and endorse the exclusive right of Tibetan Buddhist institutions to manage their own affairs, including the identification of the Dalai Lama, without any interference from the state.
- Extend a welcome to the Dalai Lama during his next visit to the UK.
- Propose Tibet be a specific agenda item in all UK-China Human Rights Dialogues.
- In joint initiatives with the Chinese government to support human rights in China, propose projects in Tibet.
- Push for open access to Tibet for British diplomats, journalists and NGOs to Tibet, including unimpeded movement within Tibet.

About Free Tibet and Tibet Watch

Free Tibet is a London-based international campaign organisation. Our vision is a free Tibet in which Tibetans are able to determine their own future and the human rights of all are respected. We campaign for an end to China's occupation of Tibet and for international recognition of Tibetans' right to freedom. www.freetibet.org, mail@freetibet.org

Tibet Watch works to promote the human rights of the Tibetan people through monitoring, research and advocacy. We are a UK registered charity with an office in London and a field office in Dharamsala, India. We believe in the power of bearing witness, the power of truth. www.tibetwatch.org