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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[13 February 2017]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Human Rights Situation in China's Tibet Autonomous Region and adjacent regions where Tibetans live shows no sign of Improvement

The human rights situation in the Tibet Autonomous Region and adjacent regions where Tibetans live shows no sign of improvement. There are rising number of protests including self-immolation by Tibetan of all ages and walks of life across the Tibetan plateau.

Tibetans continue to carry out peaceful street protests and demonstrations against the denial of their fundamental rights, leading to more arrests, prison sentences and torture. Arbitrary detention, sentencing, disappearances, interrogation and torture of Tibetans have become a common practice.

From 2009 to January 2017, 145 known Tibetans have self-immolated in the Tibet Autonomous Region and adjacent regions where Tibetans live. 126 of them died on the spot or shortly thereafter. The self-immolators continue to call for “freedom” and the “return of His Holiness the Dalai Lama”. Self-immolation protests are related to Chinese efforts to control Tibetan religious practice and culture. However, the Chinese authorities view these expressions of protest as criminal activities.

Labelling self-immolation as an "act of terrorism" incited by the "Dalai Clique", the Chinese authorities have issued guidelines aimed at punishing family members and relatives of Tibetan self-immolators. The guidelines bar family members of self-immolators from travelling, applying for loans and licences, employment opportunities and governmental aid.

Furthermore, the Chinese authorities force family of Tibetan self-immolators to sign documents stating that self-immolator set him or her on fire because of problems at home and not in protest against Chinese policies. Since 2011, there have been more than 51 known cases of Tibetans sentenced in relation with self-immolation protests.

Religious Freedom in the Tibet Autonomous Region and adjacent regions where Tibetans live
China's repressive policies coupled with intense regulation and control over religious institutions against the practice of Tibetan Buddhism has given rise to a series of protests including self-immolation protests.

Just a couple of months ago, a Tibetan man named Tashi Rabten carried a self-immolation protest in Machu (Chinese: Maqu) in Gansu province. While being engulfed in flames, he was last heard calling for the return of the Dalai Lama.

The ongoing demolition of the Larung Gar Buddhist Institute located in Serthar (Chinese: Seda) County in Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province, is a matter of grave concern to Buddhists across the world. Beginning in the year 2001, the institute has faced severe threats of destruction and expulsion of monks, nuns and lay practitioners by Chinese authorities. In July 2016, the authorities began to carry out part of a multi-year plan aiming to downsize the institute by 50 percent and evict at least half of its more than 10,000 residents by September 2017.

An order was issued by the Chinese authorities on the demolition of the institution and the reaching of the target of downsizing the number of residents to 5,000. The order mandates relevant authorities

in Larung Gar to reach the target before 30 September 2017. Saddened by the demolition of the institution three Tibetan nuns – Rigzin Dolma, Tsering Dolma and Semgha have committed suicide and left notes referring to the demolitions and government “harassment.”

A similar demolition and eviction order was issued in Yarchen Gar, another major monastic institute. Monks and nuns were seen weeping in grief and some losing consciousness witnessing the forced separation from their friends while government-sponsored Chinese military trucks transport monks and nuns back to their hometowns. The evictees were also forced to attain so-called "patriotic education" and many reportedly were being housed in a desolate camp.

Tibetans kept from taking part in Buddhist teachings in India

Tibetans were intimidated and threatened with punishment if they even considered traveling to Bodh Gaya in the Indian state of Bihar to take part in the 34th Kalachakra mediation teachings of Dalai Lama between 2 January and 14 January 2017. Many of their passports were confiscated. This is to be seen as a severe violation of their right to religious freedom as guaranteed by the Chinese Constitution. Further, there were intimidations and threatened punishments for using the electronic media in the Tibet Autonomous Region to follow the public prayers and teachings. Anyone who dared to contravene might be facing up to five years imprisonment, since public prayers or meditations are regarded as a “threat to public order”, the authorities warned. There were even attempts to censor social media platforms to keep the people from following the Kalachakra rites, which are highly important for the Tibetan Buddhists. Thus, WeChat was forced to block keywords and messages that have to do with the Kalachakra rites, and the recipients of the message are not even informed in case a message was not passed on to them.

Peaceful Solo Protestors Detained

Tibetans continue to protest despite knowing the consequences of being caught. Most of the solo protestors were seen carrying photo of the Dalai Lama and calling for freedom. In 2015, there were 19 known cases of solo protests, and in 2016, there were nine known cases of solo protests.

On 15 November 2016, two Tibetan women staged a peaceful demonstration in the street of Ngaba town in Sichuan Province. A video footage of the demonstration circulated in social networking sites shows the women carrying a portrait of the Dalai Lama overhead and calling “long live the Dalai Lama”. The wellbeing, whereabouts and identification of two women remains unknown to this day.

On 16 December 2016, Tenpa, an eighteen-year-old Tibetan was beaten and forcibly taken into custody following a solo protest demanding freedom. His well-being and whereabouts are unknown.

Rampant Torture Continues to Exist

China continues to sort to torture as one of the key means to repress dissents despite ratifying the UN Convention against Torture & Other Cruel or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The UN Committee against Torture and other UN mandate holders have repeatedly asked China to change its laws to ban all forms of torture. However, torture still remains rampant in the Tibet Autonomous Region and adjacent regions where Tibetans live.

Former political prisoners described innumerable cruel and degrading treatment and torture methods such as electric shocks, being forced to stand on iced ground until the feet gets stuck to the ice, being

beaten with wooden planks, being forced into kneeling positions for days until blood drips out of their body, being stomped on their entire body, being kept near starvation with just a mug of water a day. From time to time, the police changes its torture techniques and adopts new methods, which leaves no visible sign of torture.

In February 2016, in the concluding observations on the Fifth Periodic Report of China, the UN Committee against Torture stated "... the Committee has received numerous reports from credible sources that document in detail cases of torture, deaths in custody, arbitrary detention and disappearances of Tibetans."

Torture remains a widespread and systematic instrument in Chinese political repression in the Tibet Autonomous Region and adjacent regions where Tibetans live. In 2016 alone, there were five known cases of death due to torture. On 8 August 2016, Khenrab Tharchin, a Tibetan monk from the Dingri Shelkar Choedhe monastery died on his way to the hospital. Tharchin was sentenced for 5 years in prison for refusal to participate in the so-called "patriotic re-education campaign." He had been released in 2013 due to poor health. Since then his health continued to deteriorate. He could not recover from the injuries he suffered due to torture in prison.

The human rights situation in the Tibet Autonomous Region and adjacent regions where Tibetans live is deteriorating. It requires urgent international attention. The cycle of self-immolation in the Tibet Autonomous Region and adjacent regions where Tibetans live sends an unequivocal message about the need for the Chinese government to reassess its policy and to heed the aspirations of Tibetan people and their calls for human rights.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls upon the members of the United Nations Human Rights Council to urge China to:

- To end all its repressive policies leading Tibetans to resort to tragic act of self-immolation protests,
- To respect the religious freedom of Tibetans,
- To implement all the recommendations made by the UN mandate holders and treaty bodies on all issues pertaining to the Tibet Autonomous Region and adjacent regions where Tibetans live and respect human rights.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls upon the members of the United Nations Human Rights Council:

- To urge the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to take immediate action in the case of demolition of Larung Gar and Yarchen Gar and push for a visit to the Tibet Autonomous Region and adjacent regions where Tibetans live to assess and address the pressing situation.
