



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
XX May 2022

English only

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## Human Rights Council

Fiftieth session

13 June–8 July 2022

Agenda item 2

**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner  
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the  
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

### **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.

[23 May 2022]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only. The views expressed in the present document do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials.

## **Human Rights Situation in the Tibet Autonomous Region and Adjacent Tibetan Areas**

Society for Threatened Peoples continues to remain deeply disturbed by the repressive situation of Tibetans in the Tibet Autonomous Region and adjacent areas where Tibetans live in the People's Republic of China. In particular, Tibetan regions are ranked the most repressed regions in the world by Freedom House, an independent watchdog.

Society for Threatened Peoples is furthermore dismayed by the incumbent UN High Commissioner for Human Rights' lack of transparency, muted response and absence of initiative in addressing the genuine grievances of the Tibetan people.

Threats and harassment push Father of Self Immolator Tsewang Norbu to commit suicide:

Choegyen, father of recent Tibetan self-immolator Tsewang Norbu, committed suicide due to constant intimidation and harassment from the Chinese police, earlier this May. He was subjected to repeated intimidations and harassment following the information of self-immolation of his son, Tsewang Norbu, surfaced outside the Tibet Autonomous Region and adjacent regions where Tibetans live.

Choegyen's 25-year-old son Tsewang Norbu, a popular Tibetan singer, set himself on fire in front of the Potala palace, on 25 February. He succumbed to burn injuries and died in the People's Hospital of Tibet Autonomous Region. Tsewang Norbu is the 156th known case of self-immolation protests in Tibet since 2009. A month after Tsewang Norbu's self-immolation, the 81-year-old Tibetan Taphun died after a self-immolation protest on 27 March 2022. At least 159 Tibetans have burned alive calling for freedom and return of Dalai Lama to the Tibet Autonomous Region.

27 Years of Enforced Disappearance of 11th Panchen Lama Gedhun Choekyi Nyima and Chinese meddling in the Tibetan reincarnation system:

Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the 11th Panchen Lama, recognized by the Dalai Lama, has been missing for over 27 years now. He was forcibly removed from the public eye when he was merely six years old. China has refused to divulge any verifiable information about the well-being and whereabouts of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, his family and Chadrel Rinpoche. China claims he has "entered university" and is "employed" now, in response to a UN special procedures' joint communication to China AL CHN 12/2020 of 2 June 2020. However, no independent experts have been able to verify the claims, and moreover the international calls to give access to the rightful Panchen Lama Gedhun Choekyi Nyima has fallen on deaf ears.

The continued disappearances of the Panchen Lama, his family members and Chadrel Rinpoche is not only a violation of civil rights of individuals but also an infringement of the collective rights of the Tibetan people since the right to appoint a religious leader is recognised by the international law as an essential aspect of freedom of religion and belief.

The 11th Panchen Lama has missed religious education and training which is necessary for reincarnated Tibetan Buddhist heads, and his followers have been deprived of his presence for 27 years.

The imposition of regulation such as "Order no-5" systematically control centuries old Tibetan Buddhist important traditional practice of recognizing the lineages of religious teachers (reincarnation). The installation of the Chinese choice of Panchen Lama, son of two communist party members, in place of the Panchen Lama recognized by Dalai Lama on 14 May 1995, reflects China's plan to interfere and manipulate in the selection of the next Dalai Lama.

#### Denial of Access to Education in Mother tongue - Tibetan language:

Since 2020, Chinese authorities in Tibetan regions have implemented the unified Chinese - Putonghua (Mandarin) - textbook system, making Putonghua-medium education mandatory in schools at all levels and grades. Both state and private schools are required to adopt the new Han-centric textbooks. China has further declared more regressive efforts to be made in bringing 85% of people in regions under its control to speak Mandarin by 2025, and make it virtually universal by 2035.

The remaining Tibetan medium language schools in rural Tibetan areas are increasingly facing forcible closure and subject to comply with restrictive directives. For instance, in July 2021, the Sengdruk Taktse Middle School in the Golog Tibetan area in Sichuan Province was forced to shut down. Similarly, in October 2021, Drakgo monastery school which offered both Tibetan traditional and modern education was demolished. Over 130 Tibetan children were forced to return home without access to alternative schools with Tibetan language and cultural education.

#### Colonial-style Boarding School System:

China is ramping up its efforts to eliminate Tibetan identity by rooting out Tibetan children from access to Tibetan language, community and culture. A recent report has revealed at least 800,000- 900,000 Tibetan children from rural areas aged 6-18 are subjected to the colonial-style boarding school system. It is believed that the actual number of Tibetans who are subjected to colonial style of school in the Tibet Autonomous Region and adjacent regions where Tibetans live is much higher than the report had indicated.

#### Demolition and Destruction of Tibetan Buddhist Religious Sites:

China restricts and curtails cultural and religious expression of Tibetans by removing cultural and Buddhist religious sites. In less than two months from end of November 2021 to 3 December 2021, Chinese authorities in Kham Drakgo demolished two Buddhist statues (99-foot-tall Buddha statue and 30-foot-tall Maitreya statue), dismantled 45 giant Buddhist prayer wheels and burned down all Tibetan prayer flags. Since 2016, China has resumed wide scale demolitions of two well-known Buddhist institutes, Larung Gar and Yachen Gar, in Karze (Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan prefecture. Larung Gar was one of the largest Tibetan Buddhist institutes in the world. Nearly 5,000 monastic dwellings were destroyed and monks, nuns and lay Buddhist students evicted to reduce the population from more than 10,000 to 5,000 residents. Similarly, out of the 10,000 residents at Yachen Gar, about 2,000 residents were evicted and around the same number of homes were destroyed.

#### Environmental Destruction on the Tibetan Plateau:

The Tibetan plateau is among the last wild places in the world. It supports one of the greatest species richness of terrestrial megafauna in the world. Until 1949, there has been a limited human settlement on the Tibetan plateau but now this high elevation region has become threatened by growing infrastructure development and mining on top of a rapidly changing climate. As a result, the extent and the rate of desertification are intensifying on the Tibetan plateau. However, the Chinese government blames overgrazing caused by nomad animals for erosion and the gradual desertification of the grassland. In the name of restoring grassland, the Chinese government has implemented various policies prohibiting grazing and fencing of the pastoral area. Under such policies, more than a million Tibetan nomads were forced to resettle from their land and pushed into large-scale concrete

settlements with no sustainable medical, educational, and business opportunities to support a dignified life and retain their identity. There are many scientists, including Chinese, who have written extensively about the need for moderate grazing to maintain the ecosystem's health. The forceful removal of Tibetan nomads, who have preserved the fragile grassland for centuries, and has in fact accelerated the degradation of the grassland.

Persecution of Human Rights defenders and intellectuals in the Tibet Autonomous Region and adjacent regions where Tibetans live:

The Chinese government uses vague terminologies and an arbitrary interpretation of laws to persecute Tibetan human rights defenders, intellectuals and environmentalists with criminal charges. The UN Special Procedures' joint communication to China -AL CHN14/2021 of 17 February 2022, AL CHN7/2021 of 16 July 2021, UA CHN 11/2020 of 12 May 2020, on Tibetan rights defender A-Nye Sengdra, Tibetan writers Go Sherab Gyatso and Rinchen Tsultrim; writer Lobsang Lhundup (Pen name Dhi Lhaden), musician Lhundrup Drakpa and teacher Rinchen Kyi demonstrated relentless persecutions of Tibetan rights defenders and intellectuals for voicing their critical views on Chinese policies in the Tibet Autonomous Region and adjacent regions where Tibetans live. These cases are not isolation events, but uncover more general crackdown against Tibetan rights defenders and intellectuals.

Recommendations:

Society for Threatened People calls on the Human Rights Council to demand accountability from China for its persecution of the Tibetan people, and heed the following recommendations:

- Endorse the Committee on Rights of Child's recommendation to allow an independent access to ascertain the fate of 11th Panchen Lama;
- Ensure Tibetan Buddhist are able to freely practise their religion, including the right to choose their own religious leaders without Chinese government interference;
- Ensure Tibetan children have access to education in their mother tongue in all level of their schooling and high studies;
- Call upon China to engage in a meaningful consultation with the local Tibetan communities before formulating or implementing any environmental policies;
- Call upon China to protect freedom of opinion and expression, including artistic expression, and Prohibit criminalization of rights defenders on the basis of religion and ethnicity;
- Follow up with the UN experts June 2020 call for decisive measures to protect fundamental freedom in China by convening a special session to evaluate the range of violations perpetrated by China.