

TIBET BRIEF

MARCH 2020

A REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

NEW 'ETHNIC UNITY' REGULATIONS VIOLATE TIBETANS' HUMAN RIGHTS

A NEW BRIEFING BY THE INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET REVEALS HOW RECENTLY ADOPTED "ETHNIC UNITY" REGULATIONS IN TIBET WILL FURTHER ERODE TIBETANS' BASIC FREEDOMS AND VIOLATE THEIR HUMAN RIGHTS.



A flag-raising ceremony in Lhasa. (Photo: Chinese state media)

The new regulations, adopted on 11 January by the third session of the 11th People's Congress of the Tibet Autonomous Region, aim to establish "model areas for national unity and progress" in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), and give the Chinese government powers to enforce a Chinese-centric way of life in the TAR and cultivate informants for the Chinese Communist Party. Certain provisions stand out, as they aim at indoctrinating even Tibetan preschool children with ideological propaganda and intervene in the protected spheres of family and privacy.

The regulations articulate long-held policy goals that seeking to reduce ethnic differences in the People's Republic of China in order to achieve a stable, Chinese-centric society and consolidate the Communist Party's grip on the border regions of Tibet and Xinjiang (known to Uyghurs as East Turkestan). Most importantly, and for the first time, the regulations explicitly depart from the principle of preferential treatment for Tibetans, which was supposed to guarantee that Tibetans

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INTERNATIONAL
CAMPAIGN
FOR TIBET

ICT EUROPE

Funenpark 1D
1018 AK Amsterdam,
The Netherlands
Phone: +31 (0)20 3308265
Fax: +31 (0)20 3308266
icteurope@savetibet.nl

ICT BRUSSELS

15, rue de la linière
1060 Brussels
Belgium
Phone: +32 (0)2 609 44 10
Fax: +32 (0)2 609 44 32
info@savetibet.eu

ICT GERMANY

Schonhauser Allee 163
10435 Berlin
Germany
Tel.: +49 (0)30 27879086
Fax: +49 (0)30 27879087
info@savetibet.de

ICT

1825 Jefferson Place, NW
Washington, DC 20036
United States of America
Phone: +1 (1) 202-785-1515
Fax: [202] 785-434
info@savetibet.org

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could maintain their culture and historic way of life under Chinese rule. While Tibetans have faced systematic discrimination even under the preferential treatment policy, the new regulations heighten fears that they will be forced to assimilate into Chinese culture even more rapidly.

The imposition of a dominant ethnic culture on all citizens violates several international human rights standards, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The International Campaign for Tibet therefore calls on the international community to urge

the Chinese government to review its laws on ethnic policies and streamline them so they are clear, legally consistent and conform to international human rights standards.

[Download ICT's briefing paper on the new 'ethnic unity' regulations](#)

ICT'S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY FRAMEWORK

TIBET'S BIODIVERSITY CHALLENGES PROVIDE INSIGHTS THAT CAN HELP SHAPE A PRACTICAL, INCLUSIVE AND ACCOUNTABLE GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY FRAMEWORK, THE INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET SAYS IN A NEW BRIEFING PAPER.



A Tibetan antelope or "Chiru". (Photo: Xi Zhinong, Nature Picture Library)

The paper, titled "Tibet-informed Recommendations for the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework," details the environmental dangers facing Tibet, which supports some of the greatest biological diversity in the world but is warming nearly three times faster than the global average.

As ICT's briefing paper notes, the region is sitting at the intersection of three biodiversity hotspots – defined as the Earth's most biologically rich, but threatened terrestrial regions. It is notable for its unique high altitude plant life, as well as many endangered animals, such as snow leopards, Tibetan antelope, migratory birds, gazelles and

pandas. To conserve the environment and address biodiversity loss, the Chinese government has established a system of nature reserves, 47 of which are in Tibet. However, their effectiveness is questionable, as their top-down approach ignores key areas of biodiversity and excludes local knowledge and population, at the cost of the wellbeing of both residents and the environment.

ICT recommends a rights-based approach to environmental management in Tibet that will empower the Tibetan people and allow the Tibetan plateau to continue supporting biodiversity and serving as one of the world's most vital ecosystems. Based on the lessons learned from Tibet, ICT's briefing paper also provides suggestions for the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. Countries party to the Convention on Biological Diversity are currently in negotiations that are expected to end in October in Kunming, China. ICT's proposals include paying greater attention to the drivers of biodiversity loss, fostering diverse visions of a good quality of life and more.

[Download ICT's briefing paper on biodiversity and Tibet](#)

TIBETAN UPRISING DAY COMMEMORATED AROUND THE WORLD

ON 10 MARCH 2020, TIBETANS AROUND THE WORLD COMMEMORATED THE 61ST ANNIVERSARY OF THE TIBETAN UPRISING DAY.



In Brussels, around 200 Tibetans and their friends demonstrated on the anniversary of the Tibetan Uprising Day. The event started at Schuman Roundabout with speeches by a number of NGOs and elected representatives - including Member of the European Parliament Isabel Santos and Member of the Belgian Parliament Samuel Cogolati, who expressed their determination to continue supporting the struggle of the Tibetan people for freedom and human rights. Participants then marched to the Chinese Embassy, where they peacefully demonstrated with slogans and songs. (Photo: ICT)

On that day more than six decades ago, Tibetans rose up to protest China's invasion of their homeland. As a result, thousands of them lost their lives, and their leader the Dalai Lama was forced into exile. Since then, China has ruled Tibet with an iron fist, and continues to this day to violate the Tibetan people's most fundamental rights and freedoms. Freedom House has repeatedly, [including in 2020](#), listed Tibet as one of the least free regions in the

world, behind only Syria and even worse than North Korea.

The uprising was a turning point in the history of the Tibetan people and the commemoration of this day remains of great importance for Tibetans, both within Tibet and in exile. On this historic day, Tibetans and sympathizers all over the world gather to reflect on all the courageous Tibetans who are imprisoned or have perished as

a result of their nonviolent resistance. As every year, ICT [expressed its solidarity with Tibetans](#) on this occasion, and joined in commemorative events organized around the world. In addition to a rally outside the [Chinese Embassy in Washington, DC](#), ICT took part in marches and demonstrations in Amsterdam and Brussels, while its partner organization, Australia Tibet Council, held similar events in Australia.

As Tibetans around the world commemorated the anniversary, the Chinese government made its continuing domination of their homeland clear with [a massive show of military force](#). On 6 March, a joint military drill in central Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, brought out "combat-ready" troops of the People's Liberation Army, firefighters and officers from the People's Armed Police. The drill, which has almost become a ritual at this politically sensitive time of year, was held in the city despite almost empty streets due to China's ongoing political lockdown in Tibet, which has become even worse this year because of the coronavirus emergency, which has become even worse this year because of the coronavirus emergency.



A massive show of military force in Lhasa on 6 March. (Photo: Chinese state media)

TIBET AT THE 43RD SESSION OF THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

ICT AND A NUMBER OF COUNTRIES RAISED CONCERNS ABOUT THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN TIBET DURING THE 43RD SESSION OF THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL, WHICH STARTED IN GENEVA ON 24 FEBRUARY.



ICT Europe's Director of Advocacy, Communication and Fundraising Christa Meindersma delivers a statement on behalf of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights at the 43rd session of the UN Human Rights Council. (Photo: Screenshot from UN Web TV).

In her regular [update to the Human Rights Council](#) at the beginning of the session, the High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet announced plans to travel to China this year, including to Xinjiang, and requested “unfettered access” for her advance team to prepare for such a visit. While welcoming the announcement, ICT [urged](#) her to also visit Tibet, and to raise the human rights situation of the Tibetan people in her meetings with Chinese leaders. Despite repeated requests by previous High Commissioners and the continuing alarming human rights situation there, the last visit to Tibet by someone in that role was by Mary Robinson in 1998, more than 22 years ago.

During the session's general debate on Item 4, the European Union, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic and Germany specifically referred to Tibet, raising concerns about the infringement of human rights of Tibetans, including of the religious freedom of Tibetan Buddhists.

ICT, speaking on behalf of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, also

delivered [a statement](#) under Item 4, calling once more on China to respect international human rights standards protected by its own laws and international conventions. In addition, ICT gave two statements during the interactive dialogues with the Special Rapporteurs [in the field of cultural rights](#) (focusing on Tibetan cultural rights defenders) and on [minority issues](#) (focusing on Tibetan language education).

This Human Rights Council session took place in particular circumstances amid the unfolding coronavirus outbreak. As a result of measures taken to limit the spread of the epidemic, all the session's side-events were cancelled from 2 March, and some of the session was moved to a larger room to avoid crowding. Representatives were also asked to refrain from traveling to Geneva for the rest of the session, and UN special procedure mandate holders encouraged to participate via video conferencing. The session was eventually completely suspended on 13 March, and it is not yet known when it will resume.

GERMANY BACKS TIBETANS' RIGHT TO SELECT THEIR RELIGIOUS LEADERS

FOLLOWING SUPPORT FROM THE NETHERLANDS AND BELGIUM, THE GERMAN GOVERNMENT RECENTLY BACKED THE TIBETAN PEOPLES' RIGHT TO SELECT THEIR OWN RELIGIOUS LEADERS, REJECTING THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT'S PLAN TO INTERFERE IN THE SUCCESSION OF THE DALAI LAMA.

In response to a question from German Member of Parliament Margarete Bause about the Dalai Lama's succession, Niels Annen, minister of state at the Federal Foreign Office, released a [statement](#) (p. 25) saying, “*The Federal Government is of the opinion that religious communities may regulate their affairs autonomously.*” Annen added: “*This includes the right to determine their religious leaders themselves*”. Annen also said the German government recognizes the Dalai Lama as the head of Tibetan Buddhism.

The statement from Annen adds to the growing chorus in Europe demanding that Tibetan Buddhists alone have the right to decide the Dalai Lama's successor. The move comes after the Belgian and Dutch governments recently took similar public stands.

Recently, five Members of the European Parliament from four different political groups - Petras Auštrevičius, Aušra Maldeikienė, Hannes Heide, Francisco Guerreiro and Petra De Sutter – also [submitted a written question to High Representative of the European Union Josep Borrell](#) enquiring about the position of the EU on the succession of the Dalai Lama and concrete measures the EU intended to take in order to address this issue. According to the [EU guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief](#), adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council on June 24, 2013 (in particular its paragraph 19), religious communities have the right to perform “*acts integral to the conduct by religious groups of their basic affairs. These rights include but are not limited to, legal personality and non-interference in internal affairs, including the right (...) to select and train leaders (...)*”.

CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE IN TIBET: ARRESTS, CRACKDOWN, RELIGIOUS REPRESSION

AS THE WORLD STRUGGLES TO CONTAIN THE SPREAD OF THE CORONAVIRUS, REPORTS REVEAL THAT CHINA HAS RESPONDED TO THE OUTBREAK IN TIBET BY CRACKING DOWN ON ONLINE POSTS ABOUT THE ILLNESS AND CANCELLING PUBLIC RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS AND PRAYER CEREMONIES.



Monks of Minyak Pel Lhagang Monastery in Dhartsedo, Kham, in eastern Tibet. The words in Tibetan says they contributed RMB 130,000 as a gesture of solidarity with those in Wuhan and Tawu affected by the epidemic.

The coronavirus outbreak came at an already sensitive time in Tibet, just a few days before the start of Losar (the Tibetan New Year), starting this year on 24 February. To prevent the spread of the illness, Chinese authorities announced the cancellation of public religious festivals and prayer ceremonies related to the holiday. In addition, across Tibet, most religious sites have been asked to cancel group gatherings. While the threat of coronavirus is no doubt a concern, the Chinese government

has traditionally used any excuse to stop Tibetans from taking part in their traditional religious and cultural celebrations.

Like elsewhere, Chinese authorities also warned of severe consequences of several years in prison for anyone who circulates “rumors” about coronavirus. The Tibet Commercial Daily, a state media outlet, reported that on 29 January, a netizen in Tibet named “Zhou” posted a statement

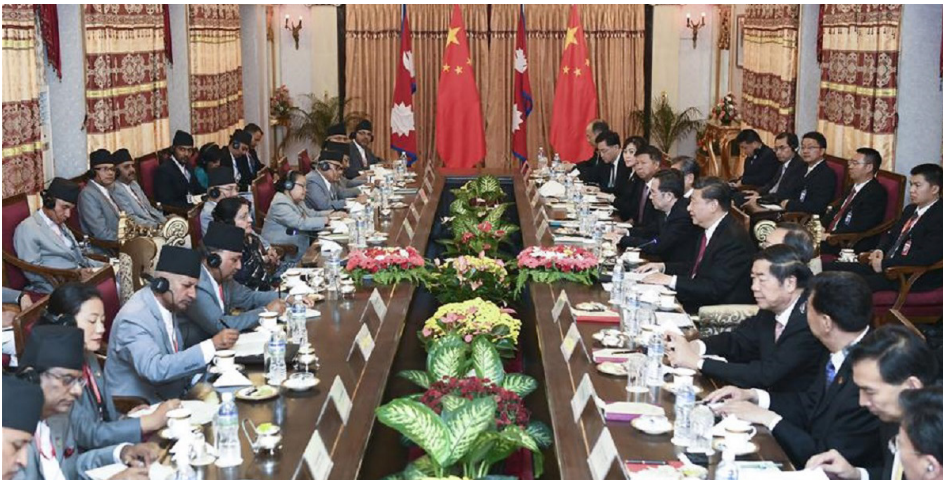
saying that “Ngari [Chinese: Ali] has one case [of the virus]” and that “no one in this pure land is safe.” For his actions, Zhou was punished with an eight day detention. According to [Radio Free Asia](#), a man named Tse in Tengchen (Dingqing) County was one of seven detained in Chamdo (Changdu) for posting a message on WeChat. His ‘crime’: Asking people to recite a particular prayer 10 times to guard against infection, and send the request to another 10 people.

Despite the Chinese government using coronavirus to further its crackdown on Tibetans’ freedoms, Tibetans themselves have responded to the outbreak with compassion and concern. Photos have circulated on social media showing several Tibetan monasteries and communities helping coronavirus prevention initiatives. Tibetans also posted images on social media of butter lamps lit in memory of Chinese whistleblower Li Wenliang, who tried to warn people about the outbreak but was arrested and punished by authorities.

More recently, Chinese state media [reported that a Tibetan man, Azi Lhundup, died from “overwork”](#) after fighting the spread of coronavirus. But this seems to be an attempt to push the narrative that Tibetans support the work of the Chinese government right up to the point of self-sacrifice. There has been no verification of the cause of Azi Lhundup’s death, nor the reasons why he was “overworking” and whether it was his choice to do so. According to a source speaking to [Radio Free Asia](#) in mid-March, life in Tibet was slowly returning to normal, as authorities declared that their efforts to contain and control the virus’ spread have proved successful.

NEW CHINA-NEPAL AGREEMENTS COULD DENY TIBETANS FREEDOMS

TWO AGREEMENTS RECENTLY SIGNED BY NEPAL AND CHINA COULD SERIOUSLY ENDANGER TIBETANS, INCLUDING THOSE RESIDING IN NEPAL AND THOSE FLEEING THERE FROM TIBET.



Chinese Chairman Xi Jinping meeting with Nepal's President Bidhya Devi Bhandari in Kathmandu, Nepal, on 12 October 2019.

The text of the Boundary Management Agreement and the Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance on Criminal Matters - both of which were signed during Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Nepal in October 2019 and obtained by the International Campaign for Tibet - represent a major escalation in China's influence and authority in Kathmandu.

The agreement on a "Boundary Management System" commits both sides to returning "persons found while crossing border illegally" within seven days. This could result in Tibetans who try to escape to freedom being sent back to the repressive rule of the Chinese Communist Party. The "Treaty on Mutual Legal Assistance on Criminal Matters" potentially opens the door for China to intervene in matters related to Tibetans living in Nepal, increasing the vulnerability and risks particularly for Tibetans who express their political views or cultural identity. Given China's influence on less-developed Nepal and the obvious power imbalance between the two countries, there are worries that Nepal may disregard legal protections for Tibetans while responding to Chinese requests under this treaty.

In addition, ICT sources say the two countries might soon sign an extradition treaty, referred to in [a joint statement](#) following Xi's visit, raising further fears about Nepal returning longtime Tibetan residents to Chinese control.

Until now, a "Gentleman's Agreement" between the Nepali government, the United Nations and other international stakeholders has ensured that Tibetans fleeing into exile can safely transit to India via Nepal, which has long been the linchpin of their journey to freedom. But Nepal's ability to counter China's oppression of Tibetans has been increasingly compromised, particularly since [Nepal formally joined China's "One Belt One Road" initiative in 2017, with promises of millions of dollars of Chinese investment](#) in Nepali infrastructure and projects. A strong marker of China's heavy and deepening influence in Nepal came with the visit of Wang Xiaohong, executive vice-minister of China's Ministry of Public Security, to Kathmandu in December 2019. Soon thereafter, the arrests and deportations of 122 Chinese took place, raising alarm among many in Kathmandu about Nepal's sovereignty and judicial independence.

POLITICAL PRISONER FOCUS TSERING DORJEE

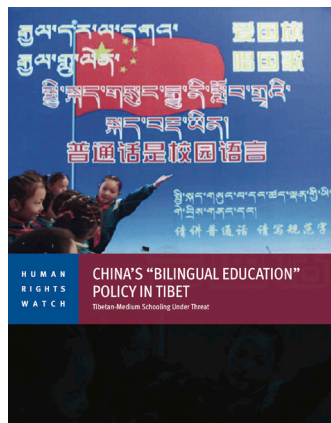
AT THE END OF LAST YEAR, THE TIBETAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY (TCHRD) [LEARNED](#) THAT A TIBETAN MAN WAS DETAINED IN A 'RE-EDUCATION' FACILITY FOR OVER A MONTH IN FEBRUARY 2019, FOR DISCUSSING WITH HIS BROTHER OVER THE PHONE ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING TIBETAN TO THEIR CHILDREN.

Tsering Dorjee, a resident of Peleb village in Tashi Zom Township (in Dingri (Chinese: Tingri) County, Shigatse (Ch: Xigaze) City, Tibet Autonomous Region, in the Tibetan province of U-Tsang), was detained on 20 February 2019 while he was on his way to visit his daughter studying at a boarding school in Lhatse. He was arrested just hours after he had a telephone conversation with his brother, Wangdu Tsering, who lives in exile. *"I had called my older brother that morning and we talked about how important it was to teach Tibetan language to our children",* Wangdu Tsering told TCHRD. *"I told him if we didn't advise our children early on, they would learn only Chinese."*

According to TCHRD, Wangdu Tsering received a phone call the same evening from a relative informing him about the detention of Dorjee. *"The detention officers told my brother that he was detained because he had maintained contact with outsiders and talked on phone about Tibetan language education for children. And that was a political crime."*

Tsering Dorjee was later handed over to the Dingri police, and his mobile phone and other belongings were searched. He was subjected to long hours of interrogation and beatings for over a month at the Dingri County Public Security Bureau detention centre (which he was told was not a prison but a re-education facility). He was eventually released with a warning that sharing his detention experience with others would result in further severe consequences.

READING SUGGESTION



HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH REPORT: “CHINA’S ‘BILINGUAL EDUCATION’ POLICY IN TIBET: TIBETAN-MEDIUM SCHOOLING UNDER THREAT”

A new report published in early March by Human Rights Watch shows how the Chinese government is forcing the erosion of the Tibetan language as a medium of instruction in schools in Tibet. This is in clear contravention of its own laws and international obligations.

fluent in Chinese or closing rural schools and consolidating them in nearby towns where students have to board, cutting them off from their families and from their Tibetan-speaking environment. It also highlights how new policies to teach students in Chinese instead of Tibetan seem aimed at indoctrinating children with Chinese propaganda from a young age and cutting them off from their Tibetan culture and history, in an assimilationist goal.

“China’s ‘bilingual education’ policy is motivated by political imperatives rather than educational ones,” said Sophie Richardson, China director of Human Rights Watch, in a statement. “The Chinese government is violating its international legal obligations to provide Tibetan-language instruction to Tibetans.”

Click [here](#) to read the report.

The 91-page report, featuring in-depth interviews with Tibetan schoolteachers, academics, and former officials, examines the Chinese government’s methods to make Chinese the dominant language in Tibetan schools, such as transferring huge numbers of Chinese teachers to Tibet, requiring all Tibetan teachers to become



UPCOMING EVENTS

- **25 APRIL:**
31st birthday of the 11th Panchen Lama
Gedhun Choekyi Nyima
- **22 MAY**
Second anniversary of the sentencing of
Tibetan language rights advocate Tashi
Wangchuk (convicted to five years in
prison on 22 May 2018)