

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Human Rights Council

Forty-sixth Regular Session

March 11, 2021

Item 4: General Debate - Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Statement delivered by Kai Mueller on behalf of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights

Madam President,

We believe the deteriorating human rights situation in Tibet warrants serious concern and action by this Council.

Large-scale mandatory “vocational training” programs in the Tibet Autonomous Region pushed more than half a million rural Tibetans off their land and into military-style training centers last year. After their coerced training, Tibetans were sent into low-wage factory and construction work in other parts of Tibet and China.

This coercive labour program is based on discriminatory assumptions about Tibetans’ “backwardness” and the need to “reform” their thinking and cultural identity, while making them loyal to the Chinese Communist Party. It seeks to reduce the influence of Tibetan Buddhism, and to force Tibetans to abandon their traditional way of life under the pretext of poverty alleviation. This program mirrors similar policies in Xinjiang. While the objective of elimination of poverty is commendable, policies should not use force or coercion, and should consider the needs and desires of affected individuals and communities.

The Chinese Government should be held accountable by this Council for these grave human rights violations.

We request this Council urge China to allow an investigation into the coercive labour program by independent human rights experts, including the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Thank you.