

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Human Rights Council

Forty-seventh Regular Session

June 24, 2021

Item 3: Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the right to education

Statement delivered by Mélanie Blondelle on behalf of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights

Madam President,

We thank the Special Rapporteur for her report, and for underlining the dangers of restricting mother tongue language instruction in education.

In Tibetan areas, Tibetan language instruction and cultural education has been marginalized by the PRC. Mandarin is now the medium of instruction in 95% of schools and textbooks systematically censor references to the Tibetans' distinct culture, religion and history.¹

Private schools run by Buddhist monasteries or Tibetan communities have been shut down² in contravention of international law, which prohibits any discriminatory treatment of children in education and protects the rights of religious communities to offer education. Tibetans who seek to protect their language face persecution and prison sentences.³

We particularly welcome the Rapporteur's recommendation to protect learners from indoctrination. We are deeply concerned by efforts to nurture self-hate and political loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party. As one former Tibetan nomad noted, 'our teachers drove us to hate our heritage, our elders, and even our parents... We felt ashamed of our cultural background; we developed an antipathy to our socio-cultural world itself'.⁴

¹ Human Rights Watch, March 4, 2020, 'China's "Bilingual Education" Policy in Tibet', <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/03/04/chinas-bilingual-education-policy-tibet/tibetan-medium-schooling-under-threat>.

² International Campaign for Tibet, July 12, 2018, 'China forces young Tibetan monks out of monastery into government-run schools as part of drive to replace monastic education with political propaganda', <https://savetibet.org/china-forces-young-tibetan-monks-out-of-monastery-into-government-run-schools-as-part-of-drive-to-replace-monastic-education-with-political-propaganda/>.

³ International Campaign for Tibet, January 28, 2021, 'Tibetan political prisoner Tashi Wangchuk released after five-year sentence', <https://savetibet.org/tashi-wangchuk/>.

⁴ Huatse Gyal, 2021, 'Our Indigenous Land is Not a Wasteland', American Ethnologist website, February 6, 2021, <https://americanethnologist.org/features/reflections/our-indigenous-land-is-not-a-wasteland>.

Education should not come at the cost of one's cultural identity. We therefore urge the Chinese government to respect its obligations according to the Child Rights Convention and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Thank you.