

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Human Rights Council

Fifty Second Regular Session

March 15, 2023

Item 3: ID with the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

Statement delivered by Vincent Metten on behalf of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights

Mr. President,

We thank the Special Rapporteur for her report A/HRC/52/29, and for acknowledging the importance of raising the difficulties human rights defenders face, while also celebrating their successes.

We would like to draw the attention of the Council to the specific situation of Tibetan environmental defenders. These brave advocates are now experiencing increased persecution for their vital efforts to protect their distinct way of life and preserve their lands and natural resources against extensive mining, damming, and destructive infrastructure projects.

The International Campaign for Tibet documented 50 environmental defenders detained arbitrarily, arrested, tried, and/or sentenced since 2008.¹ Of the 50 Tibetan environmental defenders' cases surveyed:

- 21 are serving prison sentences with an average sentence length of 8.5 years.
- Five have completed their sentences, but it is not certain that all 5 have been released.
- The whereabouts of 20 individuals remain unknown.
- Four have died due to abuse by state agents: one fatally shot during a protest, and three died in custody.

Tibetan environmental defenders are crucial for protecting the Tibetan Plateau's fragile environment and its function as the headwaters for the entire region's major riparian systems. They should never be punished for their work.

We urge the Human Rights Council to press China to uphold and protect the rights of Tibetan environmental defenders – including their rights to freely express their opinion, associate,

¹ International Campaign for Tibet, June 2022, 'Environmental defenders of Tibet', https://savetibet.de/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/2205-ICFT-Report_V8.pdf.

assemble and participate in decision-making – and to immediately release all those detained, among them prominent defenders Anya Sengdra² and Karma Samdrup.³

Thank you.

² OHCHR, 19 May 2020, 'UN experts urge China to drop charges against jailed Tibetan minority human rights defender', <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2020/05/un-experts-urge-china-drop-charges-against-jailed-tibetan-minority-human?LangID=E&NewsID=25894>.

³ International Campaign for Tibet, 4 August 2010, 'A sharp knife above his head': the trials and sentencing of three environmentalist brothers in Tibet', <https://savetibet.org/a-sharp-knife-above-his-head-the-trials-and-sentencing-of-three-environmentalist-brothers-in-tibet/>.