

GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
**Human Rights Council**  
Fifty-fourth Regular Session  
September 18, 2023

**Item 3: Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery**

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

Mr. President,

We thank the Special Rapporteur for his report.

In April 2023, multiple UN experts, among them the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, have identified so-called “labor transfer” and “vocational training” programs inflicted on the Tibetan people as a smoke screen suppressing the Tibetan people’s right to religious, linguistic, and cultural identity.<sup>1</sup> We are grateful for the Special Rapporteur’s co-signing of the relevant public statement.

In July 2022, the Special Rapporteur raised his concern regarding labor transfer programs also in the Tibet Autonomous Region, where “indicators of forced labour pointing to the involuntary nature of work rendered by affected communities have been present in many cases”, which in “some instances may amount to enslavement as a crime against humanity, meriting a further independent analysis.”<sup>2</sup>

Contrary to claims of improving living conditions, research indicates military-style training, political indoctrination and assignment to workplaces - most likely not voluntarily – as well as the absence of clear remuneration.

UN experts also called on China to explain how it will align the programs with its obligations under international law to prevent forced labor.

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<sup>1</sup> OHCHR, 27 April 2023, ‘China: “Vocational training” programmes threaten Tibetan identity, carry risk of forced labour, say UN experts’, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/04/china-vocational-training-programmes-threaten-tibetan-identity-carry-risk>.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, General Assembly, A/HRC 51/26, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G22/408/97/PDF/G2240897.pdf?OpenElement>.

We call on Human Rights Council members to use the upcoming UPR of China to urge the Chinese government to make information on labor transfer and training schemes in Tibetan areas publicly available and include provisions that allow Tibetans to opt out of these programs.

Thank you.