



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

CURRENT SITUATION IN TIBET (SPRING 2019)

FREEDOM OF RELIGION

The State Department 2018 Human Rights report released March 13, 2019, “documents substantial interference with the rights of peaceful assembly and freedom of association; severe restrictions of religious freedom; significant restrictions on freedom of movement; and restrictions on political participation” for the people of Tibet. Similarly, a February 2018 report by Amnesty International also confirms that Tibetans continue to face discrimination and restrictions on their rights to freedom of religion and belief, of opinion and expression, of peaceful assembly and of association.

The Chinese authorities have imposed a number of sweeping regulatory measures that intrude upon Tibetan Buddhist monastic affairs and links religious activity directly to politically charged crimes and new measures to prevent Tibetans from travelling abroad to attend teachings by the Dalai Lama, and to punish those who do. In 2017, Chinese authorities forced thousands of Tibetan pilgrims to return to Tibet after travelling to India to attend a major teaching by the Dalai Lama in the sacred Buddhist site of Bodh Gaya, India.

The Chinese government is also engaged in a strategy aimed at asserting authority over all key aspects of Tibetan Buddhism, including the appointment of lamas and teachers at monasteries, and even reserving the right of final approval over who may or may not be recognized as a reincarnated monk. These regulations are in direct contrast with international norms on religious freedom.

Major religious festivals were cancelled at the Larung Gar institute in 2017 and 2018, with Chinese authorities stating that Buddhist devotees from other areas of Tibet are not welcome there. This development follows the demolition of monastic residences, expulsion of thousands of monks and nuns and the imposition of direct Communist Party control at one of the world’s leading Buddhist institutes in Serthar (Chinese: Seda), Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan.

ENVIRONMENT DEGRADATION & WATER SECURITY

The degradation of the environment in Tibet is also a source of deep concerns and protest for Tibetans, who consider nature as sacred. The Tibetan plateau is warming up three times as fast as the rest of the world, and the ‘third pole’ is now melting, with unforeseeable consequences for the global climate. The intensive mining, as well as the Chinese policies of forced resettlement of the Tibetan nomads and water diversion projects are causing the desertification of the grassland and the pollution of the rivers. Eight of the major rivers in Asia have their sources on the Tibetan plateau, and China’s policies have devastating implications for Tibet, and over one billion people in Asia who are dependent on Tibet’s rivers. The Chinese government has plans to build dozens of dams on Tibet’s rivers and has not entered in multilateral agreement that regulate the sharing of water resources in Asia.

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND ACCESS TO TIBET

Very few Tibetans in Tibet have been issued passports in the past few years, and many had their passports confiscated even, in breach of China’s law. The restrictions on travels outside of Tibet are used as a form of collective punishment. In 2017, China announced an expansion of Tibet border regulations, reportedly aimed at combating the risk of ‘terrorism’ and ‘separatism’ in the region. However, in the absence of any violent insurgency or act of terrorism in Tibet, it is likely that this move

was in fact more aimed at preventing Tibetans from traveling abroad, particularly to receive Buddhist teachings from the Dalai Lama and for pilgrimages in India and Nepal. In December 2018, the tightened controls imposed by the Chinese authorities over passports given to Tibetans greatly reduced the number of pilgrims able to travel to India to receive teachings from the Dalai Lama in Bodh Gaya.

The 2018 State Department Human Rights Reported also highlighted the issue of lack of access to Tibet, “The government strictly regulated travel of international visitors to the TAR, a restriction not applied to any other provincial-level entity of the PRC. In accordance with a 1989 regulation, international visitors had to obtain an official confirmation letter issued by the TAR government before entering the TAR. Most foreign tourists obtained such letters by booking tours through officially registered travel agencies. In the TAR, a government-designated tour guide had to accompany international tourists at all times.”

SOLO PROTESTS

In the wake of tightening Chinese control, one-person demonstrations have been occurring in some areas of Tibet. There have been such solo protests in Ngaba area where the wave of self-immolations began in 2009 as well as in Kardze. There have been at least 39 solo protests by Tibetans from 2014 to 2018. The protestors were arrested and in many cases their whereabouts are not known.

SELF-IMMOLATIONS

The effects of the continued repressive policies in Tibet are reflected by the self-immolations of 155 Tibetans since 2009. Most recently a young Tibetan man, Drugkho, set fire to himself on December 8, 2018 in Ngaba (Chinese: Aba), eastern Tibet, close to the site of the first self-immolation in Tibet in 2009. It is not known if he survived this act of protest.

Almost all of the self-immolators called for freedom in Tibet and the return of the Dalai Lama to Tibet while they were setting themselves on fire. The Dalai Lama and the elected Tibetan leadership in exile have discouraged acts of self-immolation. They have also said that the underlying grievances of the Tibetan people need to be addressed.

However, instead of addressing the underlying causes, since 2012, the Chinese authorities have

responded by punishing those allegedly ‘associated’ with self-immolators, including friends, families and even entire communities, resulting in a spike in political imprisonments and numerous cases of Tibetans being ‘disappeared.’ This is believed to have been a factor in the decreased number of self-immolations compared to previous years.

