



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

FACT SHEET: CURRENT SITUATION IN TIBET (SPRING 2020)

FREEDOM OF RELIGION

The State Department in its 2018 Report on International Religious Freedom released June 21, 2019, said, “In the TAR and other Tibetan areas, authorities continued to engage in widespread interference in religious practices, especially in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and nunneries. There were reports of forced disappearance, torture, physical abuse, prolonged detention without trial, and arrests of individuals due to their religious practices. Travel restrictions hindered traditional religious practices and pilgrimages.”

Tibetan Buddhism focuses on a system of rigorous study that is being severely restricted by Chinese policies. Chinese authorities have also subjected monks and nuns to ‘patriotic re-education’ and forced them out of their Buddhist institutes. The State Department’s religious freedom report said, “Provincial, prefectural, county, and local governments continued to station CCP officials in, and established police stations or security offices adjacent to or on the premises of, many monasteries.” Tibetans across many areas of Tibet continued to be forbidden from holding a picture of the Dalai Lama. Children were prevented from attending religious programs or discouraged by the authorities from pursuing monastic education, while the Chinese Communist Party continued to claim the right to select and install the reincarnation of Tibetan Lamas.

In 2018, Chinese officials continued their years-long project of evicting about 3,000 monks and nuns from the Buddhist institutes at Larung Gar and Yachen Gar. Many expelled nuns and monks have been subjected to chilling ‘re-education’ programs.

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, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region, who are dependent on Tibet’s rivers. The Chinese government has plans to build 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

Freedom House, in its Freedom of the World 2019 report, said, “All organized political activity outside the CCP is illegal and harshly punished, as is any evidence of loyalty to or communication with the Tibetan government in exile, based in Dharamsala, India.” 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.

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.”

SELF-IMMOLATIONS

The effects of the continued repressive policies in Tibet are reflected by the self-immolations of 156 Tibetans since 2009. In 2019, a young Tibetan former monk from Kirti monastery set himself on fire on November 26, and died in Ngaba (Chinese: Aba) Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan, in the Tibetan area of Amdo.

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.

