



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

China's Plunder of the Tibetan Plateau: Tool of Oppression

The integrity of Tibet's environment is vital to both global sustainability and political stability.

- Six of Asia's largest rivers originate in Tibet, and almost 2 billion people across the Asian continent depend on their healthy flow. The Tibetan Plateau is the world's third-largest repository of fresh water, after the South and North Poles.
- The Tibetan Plateau is also rich in biodiversity, encompassing three biodiversity hotspots—defined as the earth's most biologically rich but threatened terrestrial regions.
- For centuries, Tibet's grasslands have sustained Tibetans' nomadic way of life, one based on stewardship and respect for the natural world.
- Climate change is one of the greatest threats to Tibet, including its nomadic culture, the Mekong River and ecological stability in the region. The Tibetan Plateau is warming nearly three times as fast as the global average.



In a mining pit on a once-verdant pasture, Tibetan villagers gather to protest the destruction of a holy mountain.

Policy of Plunder: The People's Republic of China

The PRC regime is simultaneously exploiting the Tibetan Plateau with reckless abandon and extracting resources as a weapon to dismantle Tibetans' culture of stewardship, which reflects both the pragmatic need for sustainability and a deep Buddhist belief in respect for the natural world.

Water Insecurity: The PRC has openly declared its plan to construct dozens of dams on Tibet's rivers in the decade ahead. This will place the water supply of countries throughout Asia at risk and under the Chinese government's control, providing the government yet another tool to expand its global power.

Deforestation: Decades of indiscriminate clear-cutting exacerbated climate change and threatened Tibet's biodiversity. Given that forests function to preserve watersheds and waterways, the legacy of rampant logging will be with Tibetans for years to come.

Nomad relocation: The PRC's policies of forcibly relocating Tibetans from their ancestral grazing lands under the guise of grassland preservation and human development is yet another example of its two-pronged plan to erode Tibetan identity and cash in on pit mining, logging, damming and more. Based on available data, at least 1.8 million nomads have been resettled into sedentary houses under PRC policies.

China's Plan is Underway

Just one example illustrates the severity of the environmental situation in Tibet and its regional implications. In 2019, a severe drought caused water levels in the Mekong River to drop to their lowest point in more than 100 years. This affected millions of people in Southeast Asian countries living and working along the river. The Chinese government claims that low precipitation caused the drought. However, experts underscored that China had used its network of dams to hold back water from the river. This left many without access to fresh water, according to a study by the Stimson Center.

Rapacious Chinese mining, logging and damming have resulted in calamitous disasters in Tibet. Meanwhile, Tibetan protests against the damage to their homeland have been met with brutal responses from the Chinese Communist Party. Major recent incidents include:

2009

-Toxic chemicals from a mine near the town of Lhagang leak into the river, resulting in massive fish deaths.

2010

-Over a thousand people in Drugchu die when landslides rip through the deforested hills surrounding the town.
-Chinese police shoot and kill a Tibetan demonstrator against a mining operation in Palyul.

2013

-80 die in a massive mudslide at a mine in Gyama, Tibet.
-Hundreds of Tibetans are beaten and tear-gassed while protesting a Chinese mine in Dzatoo.

2016

-Tibetans in Amchok face off against armed Chinese police while protesting mining at Gongngon Lhari, a sacred mountain.
- Another chemical leak near Lhagang results in the deaths of hundreds of livestock.

2018

-A months-long protest against a mine in Dechung ends when locals are assaulted by Chinese police.
-Amid logging and dam-building blasting operations, a landslide in Jomda County blocks the Dri Chu (Yangtse River) and forms a barrier lake that submerges several Tibetan villages.

2021

-Leaked Chinese Communist Party directives call for an end to any restraint in refraining from mining Tibetan religious sites.

US Policy

The bipartisan Tibetan Policy and Support Act (TPSA), which was passed by Congress and signed into law in 2020, addresses these crucial sustainability and security issues. The legislation states that the Secretary of State will have to pursue collaboration with China and international institutions to monitor Tibet's environment and support the Tibetan people's efforts to preserve it.

Recommendation

Coordinate with the administration to ensure the environmental crisis in Tibet, including water security and rapid climate change, is raised and addressed at the 2021 COP 26 meeting.