



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

“The Human Rights Situation in Tibet and the International Response” Hearing by the Congressional Executive Commission on China September 30, 2020

Testimony by Matteo Mecacci President, International Campaign for Tibet

Congressman McGovern, Senator Rubio and Members of the Commission,

Thank you for inviting me to testify today.

Tomorrow is the 71th anniversary of the establishment of the People’s Republic of China and while every nation is entitled to celebrate its founding, no government should lose sight of the fact that its first and main responsibility is to serve and protect all its citizens by respecting their fundamental rights. The condition of the Tibetan people in China is a reminder of how much work still needs to be done to achieve that goal.

1) Repression of fundamental rights and freedoms in Tibet.

Since the People’s Republic of China invaded Tibet almost seventy years ago, it has kept a very tight control on all aspects of Tibetan life. The deterioration of human rights in Tibet today continues to be very serious. Over the last four years, Freedom House has consistently ranked Tibet as the second least free region of the world, only behind Syria.

Tibetans can be persecuted for their beliefs. China has adopted an official plan to ‘Sinicize’ Tibetan Buddhism, to bring it under the control of the Chinese Communist Party.

To ensure government surveillance of Tibetan monks and nuns, police stations have even been opened inside or next to monasteries. Tibetans can be arrested simply for owning photographs of the Dalai Lama or celebrating his birthday, or for watching videos of his teachings.

China is also trying to control the Tibetan reincarnation system. After abducting the Panchen Lama and his family when he was just six years old in 1995, the Chinese Communist Party now plans to select the next Dalai Lama—an absurd claim that the international community needs to challenge decisively. UN bodies have persistently called for access to the “disappeared” Panchen Lama, including with a formal communication issued last August, but the Chinese government continues to refuse it.

2) Tibet work forum and China’s policy

At the end of August, Xi Jinping presided over the seventh Tibet Work Forum held in Beijing. The meeting’s proceedings indicate the Chinese leadership will continue its policy of control and assimilation in Tibet.

Xi presented a “strategy of governing Tibet in the new era” that includes “Sinicization” of Tibetan Buddhism and improving the ability of the CCP’s organizations and members at all levels “to deal with major struggles and prevent major risks.” Worryingly, Xi called for the patriotic re-education of the younger generation of Tibetans and asked the officials to look into “strengthening ideological and political education in schools, put the spirit of patriotism throughout the entire process of school education at all levels and types, and plant the seeds of loving China in the depths of the hearts of every teenager.”

Subsequently, this month several senior Chinese leaders have been visiting Tibetan areas to ask Tibetans to study and implement the spirit of Xi Jinping’s “important speech at the Seventh Central Tibet Work Forum.”

3) New evidence of coercive labor in Tibet and parallel with Chen Quanguo in Tibet and Xinjiang

In a report released on Sept. 22, 2020 scholar Adrian Zenz documented a large-scale program established in the Tibet Autonomous Region that in the first seven months of 2020, pushed more than half a million rural Tibetans off their land and into military-style training centers. These are staggering numbers. After their coerced training, at least 50,000 of them were sent to other areas of Tibet and China and pushed into low-wage factory and construction work.

The report highlights the Chinese authorities' attempts to eliminate Tibetans' traditional lifestyle, their unique identity and their way of thinking. It also highlights disturbing similarities with the system of coercive vocational training and labor transfer established in Xinjiang over the last few years.

In the wake of this new report, more than 60 parliamentarians from 16 countries have issued a statement demanding urgent action to confront such policies.

"We call upon our governments to take immediate action to condemn these atrocities and to prevent further human rights abuses," say the MPs, who are members of The Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China, which works to reform how democratic countries deal with China.

4) US Policy and legislative initiatives

As we discuss how the United States and the international community should shape and adjust its Tibet policy, it is worth looking at some of the recent initiatives that have been undertaken by this body.

Under the leadership of Chairmen McGovern and Rubio, at the end of 2018 the US Congress passed the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act, the first legislation to apply the principle of reciprocity in US-China relations, namely to challenge Beijing's policies on access to Tibet. As documented by the State Department in its latest report under the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act, the Chinese government continues to keep Tibet under lockdown, both limiting the freedom of movement of Tibetans and blocking the free access of foreigners. As a result of this legislation, last July, the

State Department for the first time, banned from the United States the Chinese officials responsible for blocking Americans' access to Tibet.

This call for reciprocal access to Tibet has also been endorsed by MPs throughout the world in an Oped published last June by over 50 European MPs following a report by my organization on the lack of access to Tibet for EU citizens, and by the recent appeal of the International Parliamentary Alliance on China.

There is growing awareness in European capitals and in Asia of the challenge posed by the authoritarian model of development promoted by Beijing. Calling for reciprocity not only on economic and financial issues, but also for civil liberties and human rights, is an effective way to challenge China's narrative, but it should be done in a strategic, well-coordinated and international fashion, which is still not the case.

5) Last January, the House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed the Tibetan Policy and Support Act. This bipartisan legislation – again introduced by Chairmen McGovern and Rubio - is now before the Senate, and we call on Senators to pass it before the end of the year. Tibetan Americans, ICT members and Tibet supporters have sent several thousand petitions to the Senate offices urging support for the TPSA. In the past several months, we have been encouraged by our interactions with Senate offices and believe that efforts are on to have the TPSA passed at the earliest. This will be a powerful message of hope to the Tibetan people who are otherwise faced with daily oppressive policies by the Chinese authorities. The TPSA will strengthen US policy on Tibet in several areas, recognizing the strategic importance of the Tibetan plateau for US interests in the region.

The legislation affirms that it is only up to Tibetan Buddhists to select the next Dalai Lama, without any government interference. It acknowledges the fragility of Tibet's environment, the key role Tibetans play in its preservation, and that the rivers and water resources originating from its glaciers that serve over a billion people, including in India and South East Asia, are of international

concern and should therefore be protected by the international community, demanding full transparency from Beijing.

TPSA also expands the mandate of the Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues, a senior position at the State Department, which unfortunately has never been appointed during the last four years. The absence of the Special Coordinator could be one reason why there has not been much movement on the Tibetan dialogue process from the Administration's side. With only a few months left in the current term of this Administration to do anything meaningful, the next Administration, whether it is Republican or Democratic, should quickly appoint the Special Coordinator for Tibetan issues at the Undersecretary level, not at a lower level position, because doing that will send the wrong political message – of diminished US support for Tibet - both to the Chinese government and to the Tibetan people. While talking about a post-election Administration, we have launched a Tibet 2020 campaign so that the presidential candidates of both parties are apprised of the American people's strong desire for Tibet to be a high priority. We look forward to working with the White House and Congress in our common objectives of supporting the people of Tibet to regain their rights and dignity.

I thank you for this opportunity.

Matteo Mecacci