



## INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

### **New clergy regulations hurt Tibetan Buddhists, Catholics**

Read online: <https://savetibet.org/new-clergy-regulations-hurt-tibetan-buddhists-catholics>

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The Chinese government will soon have even more power to control religious clergy under new regulations that will undermine the authority of Tibetan Buddhist leaders and the Catholic Church.

The Measures for the Administration of Religious Clergy (Order No. 15) will go into effect May 1, 2021. The State Administration of Religious Affairs—renamed the National Religious Affairs Administration in English in recent years—passed the measures in January.

Among other things, the measures standardize state management of clergy, require clergy to support the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and legally underpin the “Sinicization” of religion. Sinicization is an effort led by Chinese President Xi Jinping to bring aspects of society, including non-Chinese ethnic groups and religions, under the control of the Chinese government.

Adding to the government’s already vast powers to monitor, control and limit religious practice, the new measures help institutionalize the suppression of Tibetan Buddhism, the primary faith in Chinese-occupied Tibet and a growing spiritual practice in the United States and other countries.

### **State selection of clergy**

The measures reaffirm the state’s role in managing and approving reincarnate Tibetan lamas under the 2017 Regulation on Religious Affairs, the 2007 Measures on the Management of the Reincarnation of Living Buddhas in Tibetan Buddhism and other regulations.

Under the regulations, the Chinese government requires Tibetan Buddhist monks to get the state’s approval before reincarnating.

China plans to use this authority to control the succession of the Dalai Lama, with the intent to select an impostor who will be loyal to the Chinese Communist Party.

### **US policy**

However, at the end of 2020, the US government enacted the Tibetan Policy and Support Act, which made it official US policy reaffirming the sole authority of the current Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Buddhist community on his succession.

Under the TPSA, if any Chinese officials try to name their own Dalai Lama in the future, the US will sanction them.

The new law also requires the State Department to work at the international level to build support for Tibetan Buddhists’ freedom to choose their own leaders without government interference.

In addition, article 16 declares that state-run entities will approve and ordain Catholic bishops.

Article 12 says religious personnel shall not accept control by foreign forces or the unauthorized appointment of clergy by foreign religious groups and institutions.

These provisions would appear to target the influence of the Dalai Lama—who has lived in India since China forced him into exile in 1959—and the Vatican.

## **“Love the motherland”**

The measures also create new requirements for clergy to serve the state.

According to the measures, clergy must “love the motherland, support the leadership of the Communist Party of China, support the socialist system.”

Clergy must also “maintain national unity, ethnic unity, religious harmony and social stability.”

The measures also include a long list of things clergy cannot do, including “endanger national security,” “undermine national unity” and “divide the country.” The Chinese government often portrays any attempt by Tibetans to express their unique culture and religion as a threat to national unity and security.

## **Expanding bureaucracy and surveillance**

The measures will also expand the role of bureaucracy and surveillance in religious management.

As part of this system, the government will assign 12-digit numerical codes to clergy members.

In addition, the State Administration of Religious Affairs will establish a database for all religious personnel.

Religious organizations will have to create records on clerical personnel and report them to government religious affairs departments.

Religious organizations will also have to develop evaluation systems to inform decisions on appointments, rewards and punishments for clergy members.

For a clergy member to do something as simple as engage in religious activities across jurisdictions, they must get approval ahead of time.

If clergy members or religious facilities violate the state’s edicts, they can lose their credentials and face other punishments.

## **ICT quote**

*International Campaign for Tibet Interim President Bhuchung K. Tsering said:*

“With these new measures, the Chinese Communist Party is not only harming people of faith and endangering the survival of Tibet’s unique and beautiful Buddhist religion. It is also making a mockery of the very idea of faith by turning it into just another tool to prop up the totalitarian Communist regime. From its persecution of Tibetan Buddhists, to its genocide of Uyghur Muslims, to its affronts against the Catholic Church, the Chinese government is waging war on religion. As with the recently enacted Tibetan Policy and Support Act in the

United States, governments around the world must continue to push back against China and protect the universal right to religious freedom of all people, including those living under China’s authoritarian rule.”



International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) | 1825 Jefferson Place NW | Washington, DC 20036 | United States of America  
Phone: (202) 785-1515 | Fax: (202) 785-4343 | [info@savetibet.org](mailto:info@savetibet.org)

ICT Europe  
Funenpark 1D | 1018 AK  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
Phone: +31 (0)20 3308265  
Fax: +31 (0)20 3308266  
[icteurope@savetibet.nl](mailto:icteurope@savetibet.nl)

ICT Deutschland e.V.  
Schönhauser Allee 163 | 10435  
Berlin, Germany  
Phone: +49 (0)30 27879086  
Fax: +49 (0)30 27879087  
[info@savetibet.de](mailto:info@savetibet.de)

ICT Brussels  
11, rue de la linière | 1060  
Brussels, Belgium  
Phone: +32 (0)2 609 44 10  
Fax: +32 (0)2 609 44 32  
[info@save-tibet.eu](mailto:info@save-tibet.eu)