



## INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

### Switzerland raises concerns about Tibetans in first 'China Strategy'

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On March 19, 2021, the Swiss Federal Council [adopted](#) its first public strategy for China—a document that sets out the objectives and measures for Swiss policy on China for the 2021–24 period.

The China Strategy is based on a series of principles and thematic focus areas—peace and security, prosperity, sustainability, digitalization. On the first topic, it underlines the importance of human rights for Switzerland in its relationship with China and the imperative to raise the issue in all bilateral and multilateral contacts with China.

The strategy highlights that the situation has declined markedly in China in terms of freedom of expression, protection of the private sphere, respect for the rights of communities and the protection of human rights defenders. The strategy [explicitly mentions](#) the “stronger pressure” exerted on “minorities”—in particular on Tibetans and Uyghurs.

The International Campaign for Tibet’s EU Policy Director Vincent Metten said: *“ICT welcomes the concerns expressed by Switzerland in its China strategy with regard to the degradation of the human rights situation in China and in Tibet, and its call to the Chinese leadership to respect persecuted groups such as Tibetans, Uyghurs and others so that they can enjoy the rights to have their own cultural life, to profess and practice their religion and to use their own language.”*

### Conceptions of human rights

The official document further notes the differences in the conception of human rights and in the guarantee of their protection between the two countries. The strategy shows that Switzerland is fully aware of Chinese attempts to reshape the multilateral system in its favor and Beijing's desire to reinterpret the norms of the international order according to its model of society and development, especially with regard to human rights.

Bern also points at China’s attempts to limit the access of stakeholders, from civil society to international organizations, including to the sessions of the Human Rights Council, which take place in Geneva.

The Chinese ambassador to Switzerland, Wang Shitting, [reacted vigorously](#) to the strategy during a media videoconference on the issue, at which he spoke about “baseless accusations and attacks on the political system in China, the human rights situation and domestic and foreign policy.” He accused the Swiss Federal Council of calling China “malicious signs” and of using the human rights dialogue—currently suspended—to interfere in internal affairs. Wang complained that all this had a negative impact on the relations between the two countries.

## Tibetans in Switzerland

On Sept. 10, 2018, five years after the signing of a free trade agreement between Switzerland and China, Tibetan organizations and the Society for Threatened Peoples (STP) submitted a petition calling on the Federal Council and parliament to better protect the rights of Tibetans in Switzerland. The organizations argue that closer economic ties between Switzerland and China are affecting the fundamental rights of Tibetans in Switzerland. A 2020 report of the Confederation's Intelligence Service notes the increase in Chinese government espionage activities in Switzerland, including on Tibetans and Uyghurs and their organizations on Swiss territory.

The Swiss China strategy ends with a reference to a [parliamentary request](#) asking the Swiss government to produce a report on the situation of Tibetans living in Switzerland. The National Council decided to adopt this proposition on March 9, 2021 and will report back on this issue.

The Swiss China Strategy is available in [French](#), in [German](#) and in [Italian](#).



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)