



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Tibetan rights violations significant, transnational in 2020: State Department

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The Chinese government continued to commit a range of human rights abuses against the Tibetan people in 2020 both inside Tibet and in other countries, the State Department says in an annual report.

The 2020 County Reports on Human Rights Practices, released March 30, 2021, document a decline in human rights around the globe.

In Tibet, which China annexed more than 60 years ago, [human rights violations](#) included politically motivated arrests, torture, racial discrimination, forced relocations and attempts to force Tibetans to assimilate by extinguishing their unique culture, language and religion.

Political prisoners

The State Department report highlights cases of Tibetans [imprisoned for political or religious activities](#). Citing outside observers and public information, the report says 273 Tibetans were known or believed to be detained in violation of international human rights standards as of late 2019.

Chinese authorities arrested 101 Tibetans accused of being in “the Dalai Lama clique,” referring to the [Tibetan Buddhist](#) leader whom the Chinese government forced into exile in 1959. The report says Chinese police treat supporters of the [Dalai Lama](#), who [won the Nobel Peace Prize](#), as a criminal organization.

In prison, Tibetans faced torture and inhumane treatment, the report says. It cites the case of Lhamo, a herder and mother of three whom police detained in June 2020 for the legally permitted act of sending money to family members or other Tibetans living in India. Two months later, Lhamo [died after authorities tortured her in custody](#).

Tibetans also faced a deeply unjust court system, the report says. Among other violations of due process, many Tibetans did not have access to legal representation during pretrial detention.

The report says that although there were some licensed Tibetan lawyers in Tibetan areas, they were often afraid to defend individuals in front of Chinese judges out of fear of reprisal or disbarment.

In cases that involved charges of “endangering state security” or “separatism,” the trials were often cursory and closed, the report says.

Monitoring and surveillance

The report says China’s Ministry of Public Security used tens of millions of surveillance cameras throughout the country to monitor the general public. It says, “The monitoring and disruption of

telephone and internet communications were particularly widespread in Xinjiang and Tibetan areas. The government installed surveillance cameras in monasteries in the [Tibet] Autonomous Region (TAR) and Tibetan areas outside the TAR.”

Xinjiang, which Uyghurs know as East Turkestan, is the site of concentration camps where China has detained more than 1 million Uyghurs and members of other mostly Muslim groups under the leadership of Chen Quanguo, the former Communist Party secretary in the TAR.

The report notes that China punished Tibetans for the “vaguely defined crime” of “creating and spreading rumors.” According to [Radio Free Asia](#), authorities detained seven Tibetans for spreading rumors about [COVID-19](#), including one man who posted a message on social media asking people to recite a prayer and share the message to ward off infection.

That kind of social media monitoring was common in Tibet last year. The report notes the government increased the maximum reward for information leading to the arrest of deviant social media users to 300,000 renminbi (\$42,800). That amount was six times the average gross domestic product per capita in the Tibet Autonomous Region, which spans about half of Tibet.

China made many attempts to get Tibetans to [turn on one another](#) last year, the report says. The report notes that China has created a [“double-linked household system”](#) in Tibet that groups households and establishments and encourages them to report transgressions by other groups to the government.

Authorities also directly inspected Tibetans’ households for photos of the Dalai Lama and forced some Tibetans to put photos of Chinese President Xi Jinping in prominent places in their homes.

Police also routinely stopped Tibetans to inspect their phones for images of the Dalai Lama and for “reactionary music.”

Discrimination against Tibetans

Although China has recently brought up racism in the United States in its propaganda war against the US, the report notes that ethnic Chinese held “the overwhelming majority of top [Chinese Communist Party], government, police, and military positions” in the Tibet Autonomous Region and other Tibetan areas.

The report points to China’s racially discriminatory policies as sources for the underlying grievances of the Tibetan people. It says, “As part of its emphasis on building a ‘harmonious society’ and maintaining social stability, the government downplayed racism and institutional discrimination against minorities and cracked down on peaceful expressions of ethnic culture and religion. These policies remained a source of deep resentment in Xinjiang, the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, the TAR, and other Tibetan areas.”

Ordinary Tibetans [faced discrimination](#), the report says, noting that many nuns and monks chose not to wear their religious clothes outside their monasteries in order to avoid harassment. Other Tibetans said taxi drivers outside Tibetan areas refused to stop for them, hotels refused to lodge them, and Chinese landlords refused to rent to them.

The report notes that Chinese development projects and government policies “disproportionately benefited non-Tibetans and contributed to the considerable influx of Han Chinese” into Tibet. At the same time, China was forcing Tibetans out of their home areas.

The report cites research by an NGO showing that China [pushed about 500,000 rural Tibetans off their land](#) and into military-style training centers in just the first seven months of 2020. After the coerced training, many of the Tibetans were sent to other areas of Tibet and China and pushed into low-wage factory and construction work. The Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China had released a report by scholar Adrian Zenz titled “[Xinjiang’s Militarized Vocational Training System Comes to Tibet](#),” in which Zenz mentioned the above figure.

Chinese authorities also forcibly resettled Tibetan nomads and farmers in urban areas, the report says. Tibetan herders had to pay a large part of their resettlement costs, forcing many of them into debt.

Forced assimilation

China’s attempts to force Tibetans out and move Chinese in were part of the Chinese government’s efforts to assimilate Tibet, the report says. “In accordance with government guidance on ethnic assimilation,” it says, “state policies continued to disrupt traditional Tibetan culture, living patterns, and customs.”

One aspect of Tibetan society that China targeted last year was the Tibetan language. The report states that the government promoted the spread of Mandarin at the expense of Tibetan, with private printing businesses even having to get special government approval before printing in the Tibetan language. That permission was often refused.

China is also [changing the main language of instruction in Tibetan schools](#) from Tibetan to Chinese. When five Tibetans discussed the importance of the Tibetan language in a bar, police detained them and sent them to a week-long “reeducation” program, the report says.

In violation of international [religious freedom](#) standards, Chinese authorities also enforced regulations limiting traditional monastic education to monks older than 18, the report says. The government forced monasteries to integrate Chinese Communist Party members into their governance structures, giving them control over admission, education, security and finances.

The whereabouts of the 11th Panchen Lama, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, continued to remain unknown. Last year marked the [25th anniversary of China abducting the Panchen Lama](#) and his parents when he was just 6 years old. Neither he nor his family have been seen in public since.

The report notes that, “In May shortly after the 25th anniversary of his abduction, a [Chinese] Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson stated the Panchen Lama was a college graduate with a job and that neither he nor his family wished to be disturbed in their ‘current normal lives.’”

China continues to refuse to allow the Panchen Lama, a high-ranking Tibetan Buddhist leader, to [speak publicly for himself](#).

Human rights violated abroad

China also refused to allow the Dalai Lama, who [turned 85 last year](#), to return home to Tibet after more than six decades in exile in India.

In addition, China heavily [restricted foreign journalists’ ability to enter Tibet](#), the report says. China routinely denied the required permission for journalists to visit the Tibet Autonomous Region and strictly controlled the movements of the few reporters who did get in.

The report says Beijing also “continued to restrict, evict, and investigate local NGOs that received foreign funding and international NGOs that provided assistance to Tibetan communities in the TAR and other Tibetan areas. Almost all were forced to curtail their activities altogether due to travel restrictions, official intimidation of staff members, and the failure of local partners to renew project agreements.”

Despite [keeping Tibet closed off to the outside world](#), China didn’t allow national boundaries to limit its human rights violations against the Tibetan people and their supporters. “Technically sophisticated” hacking attempts originating in China targeted Tibetan activists and organizations abroad, the report says.

China also allegedly subjected the Tibetan exile community to “harassment, monitoring, and cyberattacks,” the report says.

Chinese officials also forced Tibetans to pressure their relatives seeking asylum overseas to return home.

Restriction on Tibetans in Nepal

The State Department report also highlights the restrictions faced by [Tibetans residing in Nepal](#). It says, “Most Tibetan refugees who lived in the country, particularly those who arrived after 1990 or turned 16 after 1995, did not have documentation, nor did their locally born children. Even those with acknowledged refugee status had no legal rights beyond the ability to remain in the country.”

The report adds: “The children born in the country of Tibetans with legal status often lacked documentation. The government allowed NGOs to provide primary- and secondary-level schooling to Tibetans living in the country. Tibetan refugees had no entitlement to higher education in public or private institutions. They were unable legally to obtain business licenses, driver’s licenses, bank accounts, or to own property. Some refugees continued to experience difficulties documenting births, marriages, and deaths. Some in the Tibetan community resorted to bribery to obtain these services.”

The report also focuses on the denial of basic rights to Tibetans in Nepal, saying, “The government continued to limit freedom of association and peaceful assembly for members of Kathmandu’s Tibetan community, including by denying requests to celebrate publicly certain culturally important events, such as the Dalai Lama’s birthday, and deploying large numbers of police officers to Tibetan settlements to monitor private celebrations of this and other culturally important events, including Tibetan Uprising Day and Tibetan Democracy Day.”

The report says there has been a decrease in the number of Tibetans escaping through Nepal. It says, “After China heightened security in 2008 along its border and increased restrictions on internal freedom of movement for ethnic Tibetans, the number of Tibetans who transited through the country dropped significantly. [The UN High Commissioner for Refugees] reported that 53 Tibetans transited the country in 2017, 37 in 2018, 23 in 2019, and 5 as of September.”

Missing issues in the report

The report fails to highlight two major Chinese policy approaches that had an impact on the human rights of the Tibetan people in 2020. They are the increasing use of [national security](#) and the increasing use of [anti-gang measures](#) to silence Tibetans and community organizations.

Chinese authorities in Tibet have been increasingly using China's national security and the associated laws to crack down on dissenting Tibetans. The authorities' interpretation of national security trumping human rights is concerning. China's definition of national security is broad and vague. It gives broad powers to the authorities to detain and arrest Tibetans under the justification of China's national security.

China's three-year campaign (2018-2020) against gang crimes was also applied to strike against Tibetan community organizations and individuals in both the TAR and outside the TAR. That application is documented in the [International Campaign for Tibet's](#) and [Human Rights Watch's](#) reports on arrests and sentencing of Tibetans under the "Saohei Chu-e" campaign. China's labeling and punishing of community organizations and peaceful dissidents as gang members is disturbing.

ICT quote

In response to the State Department report, the International Campaign for Tibet said:

"The Chinese government is trying to undermine the very idea of universal human rights by claiming to have its own, culturally specific model. But anyone who looks at the Tibet section of the State Department's 2020 report can tell that China's claims are a joke. From torturing and beating Tibetan political prisoners to death after sham trials, to detaining Tibetans for speaking out about COVID-19, to blocking foreign journalists' access to Tibet and treating support for the Dalai Lama as an organized crime, it's obvious that China's model of human rights is no human rights at all.

"On top of that, China is spreading its subversion of human rights around the globe, both by hacking and harassing Tibetan activists abroad and by trying to push its human rights vision on other countries. As the State Department has done with this report, the rest of the world must continue to speak out against China's human rights abuses in Tibet before those abuses become the new norm."

[Read the full State Department 2020 human rights report on Tibet.](#)



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