



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Biden administration Tibet access report says China 'systematically impeded' travel

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The Chinese government “systematically impeded” travel to Tibetan areas by US diplomats, journalists and tourists in 2021, the State Department says in a new report mandated by a law that pushes for US access to Tibet.

“This report shows how far China is going to hide the truth about its horrific human rights violations in Tibet,” said Franz Matzner, government relations director of the International Campaign for Tibet. *“Facts are stubborn things, though, and the global community must not let the People’s Republic of China conceal its cruelty and agenda of domination against the Tibetan people.”*

The State Department submitted the report to Congress yesterday, March 16, 2022. It is the fourth annual report on access to Tibet under the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act, a law that Congress passed in 2018 to confront China’s unfair policy of denying Americans entry to Tibet even though Chinese citizens are free to travel throughout the United States.

As a result of the law’s implementation, the State Department has denied entry to the US by the Chinese officials responsible for keeping Americans out of Tibet.

The new report says China maintained strong restrictions on access last year, sometimes using COVID-19 as a pretext.

“The PRC authorities systematically impeded travel to the TAR and to many Tibetan areas outside the TAR for U.S. diplomats and officials, journalists, and tourists in 2021,” the report says, referring to the Tibet Autonomous Region, which spans about half of Tibet. The TAR is the only area under Chinese rule that foreign citizens must receive special permission to enter, although such permission is rarely granted.

The report arrives just weeks after the watchdog group Freedom House declared Tibet the least-free country on Earth in a tie with South Sudan and Syria.

The Chinese government has illegally occupied Tibet for over 60 years.

“The Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act was designed to end China’s practice of restricting access to the ‘Land of Snows,’” Matzner added. *“If China remains unwilling to let the world see what it’s doing in Tibet, the State Department should consider naming names in future reports so that everyone can see who is responsible for these policies.”*

Report findings

Among the findings in this report are:

- Access to the Tibetan population by diplomats and other officials did not improve in 2021 compared to 2020. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the US Embassy in Beijing estimates the number of US citizens who visited the TAR decreased substantially in 2021.
- In 2021, the TAR continued to be the only area of China that authorities required foreign diplomats and officials to request permission to visit. In 2021, the PRC government denied official requests from the US Embassy in Beijing for the chargé d'affaires to visit the TAR. Travel to Tibetan areas outside the TAR continued to be restricted for US diplomats in 2021.
- According to the 2021 annual report of the Foreign Correspondents' Club of China, the Chinese government denied the requests of all four of the foreign journalists who applied for permission to travel to the TAR in 2021. One US journalist was blocked from entering Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan. Other US correspondents were removed from Tibetan areas of Sichuan by police and detained in Chengdu, even when covering non-sensitive stories.
- In Tibetan areas outside the TAR, Chinese authorities routinely denied requests for meetings with government, religious and civil society leaders. Security forces used conspicuous monitoring to intimidate US diplomats and officials, including while on personal travel to Tibetan areas, followed them, prevented them from meeting or speaking with local contacts, harassed them and restricted their movement. Access to these areas for journalists remained restricted and limited.

Impact of Chengdu consulate closure

The report says the suspension of operations at the US Consulate General in Chengdu in July 2020 had an impact on US work on Tibet. The Chengdu consulate had been vital in overseeing Tibetan areas for 35 years.

Following the suspension of operations, the US Embassy Beijing took responsibility for the TAR and Tibetan areas, which are more than 800 miles away from Beijing. The change severely constrained the United States' ability to access Tibetan areas.

Discrimination against Tibetan Americans continues

As in past reports on access to Tibet, the 2021 report says China uses discriminatory policies when it comes to Tibetan Americans.

The report says, "Tibetan Americans underwent a stricter screening process than other U.S. citizens when applying for PRC visas at PRC embassies. Tibetan Americans reported more frequent harassment by security officials in Tibetan areas than in other parts of China."

The report adds that, "Some Tibetan Americans reported they self-censored their behavior in the United States out of fear of retribution against their family members in Tibet or fear of losing future access to Tibet."



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