



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

UN warning about Tibetan children shows need to resolve conflict

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UN experts' warning about China's efforts to forcibly assimilate the "vast majority" of Tibetan children by separating them from their families and boarding them at state-run schools underscores the urgent need to resolve the Tibet-China conflict, the International Campaign for Tibet said today.

"China's unconscionable efforts to cut Tibetan children off from their language, religion, culture and families is an existential threat to the survival of Tibetan culture inside Tibet," said ICT, an advocacy group that promotes human rights and democratic freedoms for the Tibetan people. "The international community must increase pressure on Beijing to return to the negotiating table with the Dalai Lama's envoys to peacefully settle the decades-long conflict over Tibet while His Holiness can still play an active role in negotiations and before Tibetans' beautiful culture is erased by China's government."

In a statement Feb. 6, three UN experts—Fernand de Varennes, the Special Rapporteur on minority issues; Farida Shaheed, the Special Rapporteur on the right to education; and Alexandra Xanthaki, the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights—warned that nearly 1 million Tibetan children have been separated from their families and sent to residential schools, where they are forced to learn in Mandarin Chinese in a curriculum built around Chinese culture.

"As a result, Tibetan children are losing their facility with their native language and the ability to communicate easily with their parents and grandparents in the Tibetan language, which contributes to their assimilation and erosion of their identity" the experts said.

The experts expressed their concerns in a letter to the Chinese government on Nov. 11, 2022 and say they remain in contact with Chinese officials.

The experts' statement this week met with deep concern from Tibetans as well as global leaders, including the Chairwoman of the Human Rights Committee in the German parliament, the US Permanent Representative to the United Nations Human Rights Council and the chairs of the US Congressional-Executive Commission on China.

China has illegally occupied Tibet for over 60 years, turning it into the least-free country on Earth today alongside South Sudan and Syria, according to the watchdog group Freedom House.

The Chinese government held 10 rounds of negotiations with the Dalai Lama's envoys between 2002-10, but since then, the dialogue process has stalled.

UN experts' statement

Read the statement from the United Nations below.

China: UN experts alarmed by separation of 1 million Tibetan children from families and forced assimilation at residential schools

GENEVA (6 February 2023) – Around a million children of the Tibetan minority were being affected by Chinese government policies aimed at assimilating Tibetan people culturally, religiously and linguistically through a residential school system, UN experts* warned today.

“We are very disturbed that in recent years the residential school system for Tibetan children appears to act as a mandatory large-scale programme intended to assimilate Tibetans into majority Han culture, contrary to international human rights standards,” the experts said.

In residential schools, the educational content and environment is built around majority Han culture, with textbook content reflecting almost solely the lived experience of Han students. Children of the Tibetan minority are forced to complete a ‘compulsory education’ curriculum in Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua) without access to traditional or culturally relevant learning. The Putonghua language governmental schools do not provide a substantive study of Tibetan minority’s language, history and culture.

“As a result, Tibetan children are losing their facility with their native language and the ability to communicate easily with their parents and grandparents in the Tibetan language, which contributes to their assimilation and erosion of their identity” the experts said.

They raised concerns about a reported substantial increase in the number of residential schools operating in and outside of the Tibet Autonomous Region and the number of Tibetan children living in them.

While residential schools exist in other parts of China, their share in areas populated by the Tibetan minority is much higher, and this percentage has been increasing in recent years. While on the national level the percentage of boarding students is more than 20%, information received point to the vast majority of Tibetan children in residential schools, almost one million children in total.

“This increase in the number of boarding Tibetan students is achieved by the closure of rural schools in areas which tend to be populated by Tibetans, and their replacement by township or county-level schools which almost exclusively use Putonghua in teaching and communications, and usually requiring children to board,” the experts said. “Many of those residential schools are situated far from the family homes of students boarding in them.”

“We are alarmed by what appears to be a policy of forced assimilation of the Tibetan identity into the dominant Han-Chinese majority, through a series of oppressive actions against Tibetan educational, religious and linguistic institutions,” the experts said.

UN experts said the policies run contrary to the prohibition of discrimination and the rights to education, linguistic and cultural rights, freedom of religion or belief and other minority rights of the Tibetan people.

“This is a reversal of policies which were more inclusive or accommodating in some respects,” the experts said.

In August 2021, the Central Conference on Ethnic Affairs called on all ethnic groups to be guided to always place the interests of the Chinese nation above all else.

“This call re-affirmed the idea of building a modern and strong socialist state based on a single Chinese national identity. In this context, initiatives to promote Tibetan language and culture are reportedly being suppressed, and individuals advocating for Tibetan language and education are persecuted,” the UN experts said. The experts sent a communication to the Government of China on 11 November 2022 and remain in contact with the authorities regarding the issue.

*The experts: Mr. Fernand de Varennes, UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues; Ms. Farida Shaheed, Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Alexandra Xanthaki, Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights Special Rapporteurs are part of what is known as the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council.

Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council's independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. Special Procedures experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are independent from any government or organization and serve in their individual capacity.



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