



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

UN Economic, Social and Cultural Rights committee addresses China's assimilation of Tibetans

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The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights reviewed China's implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Feb. 15-16, 2023, during which there was a focus on the Chinese government's extensive resettlement policy and forced boarding schools for Tibetan children, about which independent UN human rights experts recently sounded the alarm.

The Chinese delegation, which included neither Tibetans nor Uyghurs, was unable to answer important questions from the committee members, including such questions as whether Tibetans affected by drastic measures by the authorities have access to courts without fear of persecution. Criticism was also voiced about Beijing's massive interference in the free practice of religion in Tibet.

"The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has raised critical questions to which the Chinese government appears unable or unwilling to provide satisfactory answers," Kai Müller, UN Coordinator of the International Campaign for Tibet and Executive Director of ICT Germany, said after the committee meeting. "Either questions were not answered, problems were denied, or the now large number of independent reports of legal violations were dismissed as untrue. But the Chinese government can no longer escape this criticism, especially of its policy in Tibet. The international community should emphatically address Beijing's policy in Tibet and follow the example of the UN Committee today."

Forced resettlement of Tibetans

When questioned by committee members—who consisted of 18 independent international experts—the Chinese delegation confirmed that 260,000 Tibetans had been resettled by 2019 solely on the basis of a disingenuous "high-altitude" resettlement program. In June 2022, Chinese state media reported that another 17,000 Tibetans were to be resettled under this program in the months that followed.

In addition to this resettlement program, however, there are other resettlement programs that affect many more Tibetans, which are of great concern as there is no information about any objections or complaints from those affected and they could not be mentioned at the meeting.

"Tibetans really have no choice and have to agree to resettlement because they know that otherwise they face persecution and massive reprisals," Müller said, adding, "China's courts are not independent, principles of rule of law and international human rights standards are systematically disregarded."

The committee member from Spain particularly criticized a comment by the Chinese delegation, according to which the Tibetan language was not suitable for expressing scientific terminology. "With all the smokescreens that the Chinese government once again threw in this UN body, such claims are unmasking and expose the discriminatory character of Chinese politics, which views Tibetan culture as backward," Müller said.

Boarding schools assimilating Tibetan children

Regarding the compulsory boarding schools for Tibetan children, the Chinese delegation confirmed the existence of these institutions for Tibetans but denied their compulsory natures and the fact that Tibetan language and culture are suppressed by these schools. The UN experts, at the review in Geneva, reiterated the grave concern of other UN experts at the erosion of the Tibetan language "in pursuit of a unified curriculum and national common language policy" leading to the replacement of Tibetan with Chinese as the medium of instruction in schools across Tibet, including in kindergartens.

The Belgian committee member called on the Chinese government to reconsider its "ethnic unity" policy, which, as he stated, would be counterproductive and a violation of human rights. He also questioned whether the Chinese government was investigating the various credible allegations regarding its policies toward Tibetans and Uyghurs, for example through independent investigative mechanisms. The Chinese delegation did not respond to this.

Concluding observations

Up to 1 million Tibetan children are systematically alienated from their language and culture in compulsory boarding schools. Up to 2 million Tibetan nomads, farmers and rural residents of Tibet have been forcibly resettled in recent years. The Chinese government intervenes massively in the free exercise of religion and persecutes Tibetans who peacefully oppose this policy.

Ahead of China's review, ICT and the Loyola Law School made a joint submission to the committee, calling for an end to mass forced relocations and policies that coerce Tibetans under the pretext of development and environmental protection. They also raised serious concerns about educational policies in Tibet, which reportedly have led to the separation of hundreds of thousands of Tibetan children from their families and their culture.

The UN committee will publish its Concluding Observations on March 6, 2023, sharing its recommendations and findings regarding the Chinese government's implementation of the UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights



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

ICT Europe
Funenpark 1D | 1018 AK
Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Phone: +31 (0)20 3308265
Fax: +31 (0)20 3308266
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

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

