



## INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

### **State Department report says China oppressed Tibetan Buddhist leaders, practitioners**

<https://savetibet.org/state-department-report-says-china-oppressed-tibetan-buddhist-leaders-practitioners>

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A new US State Department report chronicles China's oppression of Tibetan Buddhist practitioners and efforts to keep two of the religion's most prominent leaders out of sight inside Tibet.

The State Department's 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom, released May 15, 2023, documents allegations of "forced disappearances, arrests, physical abuse, and prolonged detentions without trial of monks, nuns, and other persons due to their religious practices" in Chinese-occupied Tibet last year.

The report arrives just days before the 28th anniversary of [China's abduction of the Panchen Lama](#), a high-ranking Tibetan Buddhist figure who has not been seen in public since his forced disappearance at age 6.

The report also addresses China's ongoing refusal to [negotiate with the envoys of the Dalai Lama](#), the [Nobel Peace Prize-winning Tibetan Buddhist leader](#) whom China forced into exile from Tibet over 60 years ago.

Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken and Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Rashad Hussain released the report at an event at the State Department attended by International Campaign for Tibet President Tencho Gyatso.

*"I was grateful to join other civil society leaders and religious freedom advocates at the release of the 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom, and I'm grateful to the State Department for shining a spotlight on China's oppression of religious worshippers in Tibet," Gyatso said.*

*"As the report shows, Tibetans face horrific abuse from China's government for attempting to practice their faith freely, speak up for their religious rights or venerate their spiritual leaders like the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama. The best way to bring this oppression to an end is to push for renewed dialogue between China and the Dalai Lama's envoys by passing the [bipartisan Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Conflict Act](#) currently in Congress."*

### **Tibetan Buddhist leaders**

According to the report, Chinese authorities in the Tibet Autonomous Region, which spans about half of Tibet, required clergy and Tibetan government employees to denounce the Dalai Lama, who has not set foot in Tibet since his forced exile in 1959.

“Authorities also continued to force monasteries to display portraits of [Chinese Communist Party] leaders and required Tibetans to replace images of the Dalai Lama and other lamas in their homes with portraits of CCP leaders, including former chairman Mao Zedong and General Secretary and [People’s Republic of China] President Xi Jinping,” the report says. “Images of the Dalai Lama were banned, with harsh repercussions for owning or displaying his image.”

As one example, the report, citing news articles and rights groups, says Chinese police arrested a Tibetan named Zumkar after finding a photo of the Dalai Lama on her home altar. They also arrested her sister Youdon for colluding with Zumkar to conceal the photo.

According to the report, authorities also required clergy and government employees to pledge allegiance to Gyaltsen Norbu, whom Chinese leaders appointed as their own Panchen Lama after kidnapping Gedhun Choekyi Nyima—the 6-year-old recognized as Panchen Lama by the Dalai Lama—on May 17, 1995.

Traditionally, the Panchen Lama and the Dalai Lama have played a key role in identifying one another’s reincarnations.

With the current Dalai Lama about to turn 88, China has made clear it plans to appoint its own successor to the globally revered Buddhist leader.

However, according to the report, US officials last year “underscored that decisions on the succession of the Dalai Lama should be made solely by the Tibetan people, free from interference, and they raised concerns about the disappearance since 1995 of Panchen Lama Gedhun Choekyi Nyima.”

## **Human rights abuses**

China also cracked down on ordinary practitioners of [Tibetan Buddhism last year](#), according to the report.

The report says China “continued to place restrictions on the size of Buddhist monasteries and other institutions and to implement a campaign begun in 2016 to evict monks and nuns from monasteries.”

Between 6,000 and 17,000 monks and nuns were [evicted over three years from the Larung Gar and Yachen Gar Buddhist institutes](#), the report says. Those expelled were forbidden from continuing their religious education elsewhere; instead, many of them were forced to undergo “patriotic education.”

The Chinese government also blocked religious education for laypeople, including children. “Authorities restricted children from attending traditional religious festivals or from going on pilgrimages during school holidays,” the report says. Tibet Autonomous Region “authorities required monks to cancel all classes with children, warning that monks and parents could have their social security benefits restricted or be detained if classes taught by monks continued.”

This restriction on children’s education continued with China reportedly [separating nearly 1 million Tibetan children from their families](#) and sending them to residential schools, where they are forced to learn in Mandarin Chinese in a curriculum built around Chinese culture. This massive program threatens the very survival of Tibetan language and culture inside Tibet.

In addition, the State Department report notes that [several Tibetans self-immolated last year](#), and it cites the International Tibet Network's figure of more than 700 political prisoners in Tibet as of November 2022.

The report also cites a study from Citizen Lab at the University of Toronto finding that Chinese authorities [systematically collected DNA from one-quarter to one-third of the TAR's population](#).

## **US response**

Blinken [addressed the reported mass DNA collection](#) at a Freedom House event on May 9, saying: "We're also concerned by reports of the spread of mass DNA collection to Tibet as an additional form of control and surveillance over the Tibetan population."

The report notes other actions US officials have taken in response to China's violations of Tibetan religious freedom.

The reports says the US used "continuing visa restrictions on [Chinese] government and CCP officials whom the U.S. government determined to be 'substantially involved in the formulation or execution of policies related to access for foreigners to Tibetan areas,' pursuant to the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act of 2018."

That act, which [Congress passed unanimously](#), addressed China's [unfair policy of keeping American diplomats, journalists and ordinary citizens out of Tibet](#), even though their Chinese counterparts are largely free to travel across the US. The report says no US diplomats visited the TAR or other Tibetan areas last year.

In 2020, Congress passed the bipartisan Tibetan Policy and Support Act, which dramatically upgraded US support for Tibetans, including by [making it official US policy that only the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Buddhist community can decide on his succession](#).

The report notes that in October 2022, Under Secretary of State Uzra Zeya, who serves as the US Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues, spoke about the Dalai Lama's succession at a US Mission in Geneva event. "The importance of [the Dalai Lama's succession], its ramifications for the preservation of Tibet's rich religious traditions, the dignity of the global Tibetan community, and the protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms that we all hold dear, deserves the international community's urgent attention," Zeya said.

She added: "We call on the international community to reject any PRC attempts to install a state-selected proxy, and we will use every opportunity available with our partners and allies to discredit [People's Republic of China] interference in this process."

## **Resolve Tibet Act**

At the same event, Zeya said, "we will continue to urge the PRC government to return to meaningful dialogue with the Dalai Lama or his representatives, without preconditions."

China—which has illegally occupied Tibet for over 60 years—has refused to negotiate with the Dalai Lama's envoys since dialogue between the two sides stalled in 2010.

Earlier this year, Democrats and Republicans in both chambers of Congress reintroduced a bill that can help push China back to the negotiating table.

The [Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Conflict Act](#) will pressure China to resume negotiations by recognizing that Tibetans have the right to self-determination and that Tibet's legal status is yet to be determined under international law.

[Tell Congress to pass the Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Conflict Act.](#)

[Read the Tibet section of the 2022 Report on International Religious Freedom.](#)



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