

TIBET 2022 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), which cites the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), states that citizens “enjoy freedom of religious belief,” but it limits protections for religious practice to “normal religious activities” without defining “normal.” The constitution bans the state, public organizations, and individuals from compelling citizens to believe in, or not believe in, any religion or from discriminating against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion. CCP regulations, however, allow citizens to take part only in officially approved religious practices and stipulate religious activity “must not harm national security.” CCP regulations stipulate official control of all aspects of Tibetan Buddhism, including the recognition of lamas, religious venues, groups, personnel, and schools. They prohibit “accepting domination by external forces,” which authorities said included Tibetans living outside the country – particularly the Dalai Lama. Regulations require all clergy to pledge allegiance to the CCP and socialism and to “resist illegal religious activities and religious extremist ideology, and to resist infiltration by foreign forces using religion.”

In the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and other Tibetan areas, there were reports of forced disappearances, arrests, physical abuse, and prolonged detentions without trial of monks, nuns, and other persons due to their religious practices. There were reports of individuals dying in custody after being beaten. The government forced clergy and laypersons to undergo “political reeducation.” The nongovernmental organization (NGO) International Tibet Network reported that as of November, more than 700 political prisoners, including activists, writers, artists, teachers, and clergy, were serving sentences for “splittism” (opposition to the CCP) and “endangering state security” for promoting Tibetan language and culture or performing religious rites. Three Tibetans self-immolated during the year in protest of government policies. NGOs and media outlets reported authorities continued to arrest individuals for possessing photographs of and materials concerning the Dalai Lama and for celebrating his birthday.

Human rights advocacy groups and media outlets reported that the government continued to restrict the size of Buddhist monasteries and other institutions and

to evict monks and nuns from monasteries and prohibit them from practicing elsewhere. It forcibly resettled nomadic communities in government housing far from monasteries in what critics said were efforts to dilute religious belief and weaken the ties between monasteries and communities. The CCP continued to promote Sinicization policies that aimed to reinterpret and rewrite religious doctrines to bring them into accordance with CCP ideology and emphasize loyalty to the CCP and the state. Authorities required monks and nuns to undergo political indoctrination. TAR authorities required clergy and Tibetan government employees to denounce the Dalai Lama and express allegiance to the government-recognized Panchen Lama, Chokyi Gyalpo, who is also referred to by his secular name, Gyaltzen Norbu. The boy who was recognized by the Dalai Lama as the Panchen Lama disappeared in 1995 at the age of six, along with his family, and his whereabouts remained unknown. Authorities continued to require Buddhist monasteries to translate texts from Tibetan to Mandarin in what observers said was an effort to erase the Tibetan language. Authorities continued to restrict the religious practices of monks, nuns, and laypersons, including by prohibiting them from hanging prayer flags or burning incense. Authorities also continued to force monasteries to display portraits of CCP 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 PRC President Xi Jinping. Images of the Dalai Lama were banned, with harsh repercussions for owning or displaying his image. Repression, including arbitrary surveillance, increased around politically sensitive events, religious anniversaries, and the Dalai Lama's birthday. Officials reportedly used COVID-19 pandemic restrictions as a pretext to close temples and prevent individuals from participating in religious activities.

According to advocacy NGOs and media outlets, during the year, authorities overtly surveilled monks and nuns, encouraged families to inform on their neighbors who "undermined national religious policies," and attempted to control access to social media. In September, a University of Toronto study found authorities had collected DNA samples from between one-quarter and one-third of Tibet's population, in some cases targeting clergy, for a "public security" database. Authorities restricted children from attending traditional religious festivals, going on pilgrimages during school holidays, or receiving religious education. In an effort to Sinicize the population, authorities forced approximately 900,000 children, some as young as four years old, to attend

boarding schools that emphasized Han Chinese culture and required the use of Mandarin. Authorities destroyed Buddha statues and interfered in monastic practices, appointing official personnel and government-approved monks to manage religious institutions. The government exerted control over the selection of Tibetan Buddhist lamas. Authorities harassed Tibetan families for maintaining contact with relatives living abroad. Officials routinely made public statements denigrating the Dalai Lama and promoting the Sinicization of Tibetan Buddhism.

Some Tibetans reportedly continued to encounter societal discrimination when seeking employment, engaging in business, and traveling for pilgrimage, according to multiple sources. The Guangdong Province branch of the state-sponsored Buddhist Association of China (BAC) reportedly warned Han Buddhists against receiving religious instruction from visiting Tibetan Buddhist monks.

The PRC continued to tightly restrict access to the TAR, and no U.S. diplomats visited the TAR or Tibetan autonomous prefectures (TAPs) during the year. U.S. officials repeatedly raised concerns about religious freedom in Tibet with Chinese government counterparts at multiple levels. U.S. officials, including the Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues, the U.S. Ambassador, and other Department of State and U.S. embassy officers continued sustained and concerted efforts to advocate the rights of Tibetans to preserve, practice, teach, and develop their religious traditions and language without interference from the government. U.S. officials 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.

During the year, the U.S. government used a variety of diplomatic tools to promote religious freedom and accountability in Tibet, including continuing visa restrictions on PRC government and CCP officials who were “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. In May, the U.S. Special Coordinator for Tibet Issues met with the Dalai Lama and members of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), a representative civil support organization based in Dharamsala, India. Throughout the year, U.S. officials including the Secretary of State, Special Coordinator for Tibet Issues, Ambassador at Large for Religious Freedom, and Deputy Assistant Secretary of

State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor expressed support for Tibetans' religious, cultural, and linguistic rights. During the year, the embassy and consulates general used social media to deliver direct messaging about religious freedom in Tibet to millions of Chinese citizens.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to official data from the 2020 estimate of the National Bureau of Statistics of China, the total population of the TAR is approximately 3.6 million, of which Tibetans make up approximately 90 percent. Han Chinese make up approximately 8 percent. Other ethnicities comprise the remainder. Some experts, however, believe the number of Han Chinese and other non-Tibetans living there is significantly underreported. The majority of ethnic Tibetans in the PRC live across the Tibetan plateau, in the TAR, in TAPs outside the TAR, and in counties in Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu, and Yunnan Provinces. According to official census data, Tibetans constitute approximately 24.4 percent of the total population in Qinghai Province, 2.1 percent in Sichuan Province, 1.8 percent in Gansu Province, and 0.3 percent in Yunnan Province, although the percentage of Tibetans is much higher within prefectures and counties of these provinces designated as autonomous for Tibetans.

Most ethnic Tibetans practice Tibetan Buddhism, although a sizeable minority practice Bon, a pre-Buddhist indigenous religion. Small minorities practice Islam, Catholicism, or Protestantism. Some scholars estimate there are as many as 400,000 Bon followers across the Tibetan Plateau, most of whom also follow the Dalai Lama and consider themselves to be Tibetan Buddhists. Scholars estimate there are up to 5,000 Tibetan Muslims and 700 Tibetan Catholics in the TAR. Other residents of traditionally Tibetan areas include Han Chinese, many of whom practice Buddhism (including Tibetan Buddhism), Taoism, Confucianism, or traditional folk religions, or profess atheism, as well as Hui Muslims and non-Tibetan Catholics and Protestants.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution, which cites the leadership of the CCP and the guidance of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong and Xi Jinping Thought, states that citizens “enjoy freedom of religious belief,” but it limits protections for religious practice to “normal religious activities,” without defining “normal.” The constitution bans the state, public organizations, and individuals from discriminating against citizens for their religious beliefs. It says religion may not be used to disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens, or interfere with the educational system. The constitution states religious bodies and affairs are not to be “subject to any foreign control.” The government recognizes five official religions: Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism. Only religious groups belonging to one of the five state-sanctioned “patriotic religious associations” representing these religions are permitted to register with the government and legally hold worship services or other religious ceremonies and activities.

CCP regulations regarding religion are issued by the CCP’s United Front Work Department (UFWD). The UFWD’s Bureau of Ethnic and Religious Work manages religious affairs through the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA).

The UFWD controls the selection of Tibetan religious leaders, including lamas. Regulations stipulate that, depending on the perceived geographic area of influence of the lama, relevant administrative entities may deny permission for a lama to be recognized as reincarnated (a tenet of Tibetan Buddhism), and that these administrative entities must approve reincarnations. The UFWD claims the right to deny recognition of reincarnations of high lamas of “especially great influence.” The regulations also state no foreign organization or individual may interfere in the selection of reincarnate lamas, and all reincarnate lamas must be reborn within China. The CCP maintains a registry of officially recognized reincarnate lamas.

Regulations issued by the UFWD allow citizens to take part only in officially approved religious practices; these regulations assert CCP control over all aspects of religious activity, including the managing of religious venues, groups, personnel, and schools. Through local regulations issued under the framework of the national-level Management Regulation of Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries, governments of the TAR and other autonomous Tibetan areas control the registration of monasteries, nunneries, and other Tibetan Buddhist religious centers. The regulations also give the CCP formal control over building and

managing religious structures and require monasteries to obtain official permission to hold large-scale religious events or gatherings.

The PRC government's Regulations on Religious Affairs require all religious groups to register with the government, impose fines on landlords who provide facilities for unauthorized religious activities, and restrict contact with overseas religious institutions. The regulations require members of religious groups to seek approval to travel abroad and prohibit "accepting domination by external forces," which authorities say include Tibetans living outside the country, particularly the Dalai Lama. The regulations submit religious schools to the same oversight as places of worship and impose restrictions on religious groups conducting business or investments, including placing limits on the amount of donations they may receive, thereby constraining property ownership and development. Publication and distribution of literature containing religious content must follow guidelines determined by the State Publishing Administration. Publication of religious material must also conform to guidelines determined by the Propaganda Department of the CCP Central Committee.

The regulations also require that religious activity "must not harm national security." While the regulations stipulate that religious groups must abide by the law, safeguard national unity, and respond to "religious extremism," the term "extremism" is undefined. Measures to safeguard unity and respond to "religious extremism" include monitoring groups, individuals, and institutions, and recommending penalties such as suspending groups and canceling clergy credentials. The regulations stipulate that the online activities of religious groups must be approved by the provincial UFWD.

The Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy enacted in 2021 require all clergy to pledge allegiance to the CCP and socialism, "resist illegal religious activities and religious extremist ideology, and resist infiltration by foreign forces using religion."

Regulations known as the "20 Prohibitions" forbid monks from using social media to "incite subversion, defame or insult others, assist extremist religious groups, provide undisclosed information of the state to domestic or foreign individuals or organizations, or receive or release illegal information." Individuals who "misuse" social media can be imprisoned for up to eight years.

On March 1, SARA's "Measures for the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services" came into effect. These measures ban unauthorized domestic online religious content and prohibit overseas organizations and individuals from operating online religious information services in Tibet. The new measures also ban content that uses "religion to incite subversion of state sovereignty, oppose the leadership of the Communist Party, undermine the socialist system, national and ethnic unity, and social stability, or to advocate extremism, terrorism, ethnic separatism, and religious fanaticism," and which uses "religion to obstruct the implementation of the state's judicial, educational, marriage, social management, and other systems."

The new measures require that any individual or organization engaging in "cyberspace religious information-releasing services, reposting services, and dissemination platform services" such as streaming or publishing sermons, obtain a permit to do so within six months of the measures taking effect and validate that permit every three years. Without a permit, organizations and individuals may not proselytize online, carry out religious education or training, publish preaching or repost or link to related content, organize the carrying out of religious activities online, or broadcast religious rites, "such as obeisance to Buddha, burning incense, ordinations, services, mass, or baptisms, through means such as text, images, audio, or video, either live or in recordings." To acquire a permit, an individual or organization must apply to the religious affairs department of the government of the province, autonomous region, or municipality where they are located.

Children younger than 18 are prohibited from participating in religious activities and receiving religious education, even in schools run by religious organizations. Enforcement and implementation of these rules vary widely across and within regions. One regulation states that no individual may use religion to hinder the national education system and that no religious activities may be held in schools. These regulations have effectively barred Tibetan youth from entering monasteries prior to reaching 18 years of age.

The Regulations on the Establishment of a Model Area for Ethnic Unity and Progress in the Tibet Autonomous Region require "equal opportunities" for non-Tibetan ethnic groups at all levels of government and in schools, private business companies, religious centers, and the military in the TAR.

A government policy introduced in 2018 requires Tibetan monks and nuns to undergo political training in CCP ideology. Monks and nuns must not only demonstrate competence in religious studies, but they must also show “political reliability,” “moral integrity capable of impressing the public,” and a willingness to “play an active role at critical moments.”

Individuals must apply to the TAR CCP Committee to take up religious orders, and the committee may deny any application. Regulations also require monks and nuns to obtain permission from officials in both the originating and receiving counties before traveling to other prefectures or to county-level cities within the TAR to “practice their religion,” engage in religious activities, study, or teach. TAPs outside the TAR have similar regulations.

At the central level, the CCP Central Committee’s Central Tibet Work Coordination Group and the UFWD are responsible for developing and implementing religious management policies, which are carried out with support from the five state-sanctioned patriotic religious associations: the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (Protestant), the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, the Chinese Taoist Association, the Islamic Association of China, and the BAC. At local levels, party leaders and branches of the UFWD, SARA, and BAC are required to coordinate implementation of the government’s religious policies in monasteries.

CCP members and retired government officials, including Tibetans, are required to be atheists and are forbidden from engaging in religious practices. CCP members who are found to belong to religious organizations are subject to various types of punishment, including termination of their employment and expulsion from the CCP.

Government Practices

Human rights and media reported authorities exercised strict control over telephone and online communications in Tibetan areas. As a result, some disappearances, arrests, detentions, deaths, and destruction of religious property that occurred in prior years only became known during 2022. The government continued to control access to Tibetan areas and to enforce a strict “zero-COVID” policy which locked down areas of the country to prevent infection outbreaks. This continued to limit the spread of information and made it difficult to ascertain

the exact number of individuals imprisoned because of their religious beliefs or affiliation, determine the charges brought against them, or assess the extent and severity of abuses they suffered.

Because religion and ethnicity are often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize some incidents as being solely based on religious identity. The NGO Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy reported authorities detained 5,582 Tibetan political prisoners since 1990, although many had been released. The NGO said 94 Tibetans were detained or sentenced to prison between January and November 2022, including clergy. The NGO International Tibet Network reported there were more than 700 political prisoners in Tibet as of November, including activists, singers, teachers, writers, and clergy. Many were serving long sentences for taking part in peaceful antigovernment protests in 2008, but others had been arrested and sentenced more recently for “splittism” and “endangering state security” for promoting Tibetan language and culture or performing religious rites.

Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported that on August 24, authorities in Serthar County, Kardze (Ganzi) TAP, Sichuan Province, arrested five Tibetans for publicly stacking Buddhist *mani* stones, performing *sangsol* (an incense offering ceremony), and praying. Two sources told RFA that police beat the five individuals – Chugdar, Ghalo, Tsedo, Bhamo, and Kori – and Chugdar subsequently died of his injuries while in custody. The four others remained in detention at year’s end. One source said authorities routinely prohibited inhabitants from performing the *sangsol* ritual, saying it was “harmful to the environment.”

Three Tibetans self-immolated during the year as a means of protesting government policies, in contrast with none in 2021 and 2020. Multiple news outlets reported that on February 25, Tsewang Norbu, a famous Tibetan singer, set himself on fire in front of Lhasa’s Potala Palace, the historic residence of the Dalai Lama. Some organizations reported Norbu died from his wounds, while others said he was in police custody with his whereabouts and well-being unknown as of October. The NGO Tibet Watch reported that on March 27, 81-year-old Tashi Phuntsok (also known as Taphun) self-immolated in front of a police station near Kirti Monastery in Ngawa (Aba) TAP, Sichuan Province. The NGO indicated Phuntsok died shortly after police arrived on the scene and took him away; they did not return his body to his family. Authorities reportedly

maintained close surveillance of his family following Phuntsok's death. RFA reported that on March 30, Tsering Samdup attempted to self-immolate near a Buddhist monastery in Yushul (Yushu) TAP, Qinghai Province. Sources told RFA that authorities detained Samdup and that his whereabouts and well-being remained unknown.

According to the NGO International Campaign for Tibet (ICT), since 2009, 160 Tibetans have set themselves on fire in protest against what they said was the occupation of Tibet and abuses of Tibetans' religion and culture under PRC rule. The number of self-immolations decreased since 2013, and experts and local sources attributed this to tighter control measures by authorities and the fear that family members and associates of self-immolators might be punished. Self-immolation is considered homicide, and family members, teachers, and religious leaders may be charged as accessories to homicide if a relative, pupil, or follower chooses to self-immolate.

The whereabouts of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, recognized as the 11th Panchen Lama by the Dalai Lama and most Tibetan Buddhists, remained unknown since his 1995 forced disappearance by Chinese authorities. Nyima was six years old at the time he and his family were reportedly abducted. The Panchen Lama is considered by the Gelugpa school of Tibetan Buddhism to be the second-most-prominent leader after the Dalai Lama. On April 25, the Tibetan diaspora marked the occasion of Nyima's 33rd birthday. Advocacy groups called on the government to release him and allow him to resume his religious duties.

The NGO Tibet Watch reported in February that authorities in Chamdo (Changdu) Prefecture, TAR, detained Choedon, a university student, for teaching the Tibetan language to children in her village during their winter school holidays. Tibet Watch said the arrest was part of the government's broader effort to stop the teaching of the Tibetan language, which included in 2021 mandating that all school textbooks and instruction use only Mandarin. At year's end, Choedon's whereabouts were unknown.

In June, RFA confirmed that PRC authorities had detained Tibetan scholar and author Rongwo Gangkar from the Rongwo Monastery in Rebkong (Tongren) County, Malho (Huangnan) TAP, Qinghai Province, whose whereabouts had been unknown for more than one year. Sources told RFA they learned that noted

writer and poet Gendun Lhundrub, a former monk from Rongwo Monastery whom authorities arrested in 2020 on his way to a religious debate in Rebkong County and held incommunicado for over year, was in a prison in Sining (Xining) City, Qinghai Province, where authorities forced him to undergo “political reeducation” and translate Tibetan Buddhist texts into Mandarin. RFA reported that in 2021, Qinghai authorities mandated Tibetan Buddhist studies be taught in Mandarin in furtherance of President Xi’s efforts to Sinicize the religion.

According to RFA, on August 12, authorities in Nagchu (Nagqu) Prefecture, TAR, arrested Karma Samdup for wearing a locket containing the Dalai Lama’s picture and having another picture of the Dalai Lama hanging in his car. The arrest was reportedly part of the government’s ongoing “Strike Hard” campaign against Tibetans the government accused of “separatist acts” such as possessing pictures of the Dalai Lama. Samdup’s whereabouts were unknown at year’s end.

The whereabouts of several previously arrested monks remained unknown at year’s end. These included Dorje Rabten, who in September 2018 protested government policies restricting young people from becoming monks; Tenzin Gelek, who had protested Dorje’s detention; Lobsang Thamke, whom authorities arrested in 2018 and sentenced in July 2021 to four years in prison on unknown charges; Lobsang Dorje, who was arrested in 2018; and Thubpa, whom police took from the Trotsik Monastery in Ngaba (Aba) County, Sichuan Province, in 2017.

Sources told media that authorities routinely physically abused Tibetan prisoners and, in some cases, denied them medical treatment. Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported in February that Go Sherab Gyatso, a monk from Kirti Monastery, Ngaba TAP, Sichuan Province, whom authorities arrested in 2020 and sentenced to 10 years in prison in 2021 for “inciting secession” through his writings in support of the Dalai Lama, required immediate medical attention due to his declining health. Sources told HRW that no visitors were allowed to see Go Sherab in prison and that authorities denied him medical treatment for a chronic lung condition he developed while incarcerated for three years between 1998-2001.

In January, Tibet.net, a website run by the CTA, reported that authorities in Drago (Luhuo) County, Kardze TAP, Sichuan Province, arrested Tibetan monks Tenzin Norbu and Wangchen Nyima, who are brothers, in August 2021 on unspecified

charges. Tenzin and Wangchen both worked at Nenang Monastery in Drago County, Sichuan Province, and sources said the arrests were likely tied to the brothers' involvement in the monastery's activities teaching Tibetan language, culture, and religion.

According to RFA, on March 4, authorities arrested Passang, a Tibetan nomad, for sharing an image celebrating Lhakar (White Wednesday) on WeChat. They fined him 5,000 renminbi (RMB) (\$725) and sent him to an unknown location for 15 days of "reeducation." Lhakar is a nonviolent civil disobedience movement that promotes Tibetan identity by encouraging Tibetans to speak their language, wear traditional clothing, and boycott Han Chinese businesses one day per week. While not a religious movement, it is loosely linked to Buddhism, because Wednesday is the day the Dalai Lama was born, known as his "soul day."

In October, RFA reported authorities sentenced six Tibetan writers and activists – Samdup, Tsering Dolma, Gangye Kyab, Gangbu Yudrum, Pema Rinchen, and Seynam – to between four and 14 years in prison for "inciting separatism" and "endangering state security." A source told RFA the trials of the five men and one woman were conducted in secret and that due to tight government restrictions on information coming from Tibet, it was difficult to learn more details about their current health or whereabouts.

Free Tibet reported that in December 2021, security personnel in Matoe (Madoe) County, Golog (Guoluo) TAP, Qinghai Province, arrested a graduate student named Loten for posting on WeChat that he disagreed with the government's Sinicization of the education system in Golog TAP. Free Tibet reported in May that it learned that Golog TAP authorities in November 2021 arrested Palsang for posting messages on WeChat supporting use of the Tibetan language. According to Free Tibet, authorities held both Loten and Palsang in Xining City, Qinghai Province.

Human rights groups reported authorities continued to criminalize the sharing or possession of photos of, or statements by, the Dalai Lama and increased arrests in the days surrounding the Dalai Lama's birthday on July 6. Free Tibet and RFA reported that on June 23, police in Tsarang Township, Amdo County, Nagchu Prefecture, TAR, arrested Zumkar after finding a photograph of the Dalai Lama on her home altar. RFA reported that on July 11, authorities arrested Zumkar's sister

Youdon for colluding with her to conceal the photograph. Authorities reportedly detained both sisters in Lhasa, 500 kilometers (311 miles) from Tsarang Township, making it difficult for family to visit them.

According to local sources, authorities often forced political prisoners, particularly monks and nuns, to perform patriotic songs and dances praising the CCP and to watch propaganda films. If participants seemed uninterested, authorities considered it evidence of disloyalty to the state and subjected them to severe punishment, including beatings, and refused them permission to receive gifts of food or clothing from visiting family members.

Media and human rights groups continued to report local officials in Tibetan areas explicitly stated supporters of the Dalai Lama and other religious leaders could be arrested under the government's nationwide anti-organized crime program and encouraged Tibetans to inform on anyone who "links up with the Dalai clique."

The government 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. While exact numbers were difficult to ascertain, human rights groups and local sources said that between 2016 and 2019 (the most recent information available), authorities evicted between 6,000 and 17,000 Tibetan and Han Chinese monks and nuns from Larung Gar and Yachen Gar Tibetan Buddhist Institutes, both in Kardze TAP, Sichuan Province. Free Tibet reported in May that authorities forced many of the monks and nuns evicted from Yachen Gar to attend "patriotic education," where they had to praise the CCP and denounce the Dalai Lama.

According to local sources and media reports, authorities continued to prohibit monks and nuns from returning to rebuild their monastic communities. Authorities also specifically prohibited monastics expelled from Larung Gar and Yachen Gar from transferring to other monasteries to continue their religious education. Free Tibet reported authorities continued to replace monastic structures in Yachen Gar with hotels and other infrastructure to promote the site as a destination for Han Chinese tourists.

Bitter Winter, an online publication that tracks religious liberty and human rights abuses in the country, reported in August that authorities strictly enforced a

quota limiting the number of nuns allowed in the TAR, with the result that there were more Tibetan girls wishing to become nuns than positions available. Some novice nuns from the TAR attempted to move to Yachen Gar in Sichuan Province to evade the quota, but authorities deported them back to the TAR and reportedly sent to them to “reeducation” camps.

During the year, the government reportedly continued its policy of resettling previously nomadic Tibetans in government-subsidized housing units. For example, state media reported in June that authorities “relocated” 6,306 households (approximately 26,000 individuals) from Nagchu Prefecture, TAR, to a “new life” at a settlement that was 13 hours’ drive away. The government stated this was part of its policy of relocating Tibetans away from high altitude “forbidden areas of life” for “ecological reasons.” In many cases, resettlements were located near township and county government seats or along major roads that had no monasteries nearby. Traditionally, Tibetan villages were clustered around monasteries, which provided religious and other services to members of the community, but the government prohibited construction of new religious sites near the resettlements without prior approval. Many Tibetans continued to view these relocation measures as CCP and government efforts to dilute religious belief and weaken the ties between monasteries and communities.

The government continued carrying out its 2019-2023 five-year plan to Sinicize Buddhism in China by emphasizing loyalty to the CCP and the state. In his October 16 report to the 20th Party Congress, President and General Secretary Xi said the party would “remain committed to the principle that religions in China must be Chinese in orientation and provide active guidance to religions so that they can adapt to socialist society.” The Sinicization plan included Tibetan Buddhism, with the involvement of the state-run BAC. Regulations promulgated in 2020 and 2021 further formalized administrative procedures for Sinicizing all religions, including Tibetan Buddhism, in order to “follow the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics,” “correctly handle the relationship between national law and canon,” and placed more ideological controls on the training, selection, and monitoring of clergy. Authorities continued to require Buddhist monasteries to translate texts from Tibetan to Mandarin in what observers said constituted an ongoing attempt to erase the Tibetan language.

Bitter Winter reported authorities in May summoned monks and nuns from multiple regions in the TAR to participate in reeducation classes focused on the “three consciousnesses” – national consciousness, citizen consciousness, and rule of law consciousness. Trainers instructed clergy to condemn “separatism” and “obey without question the CCP, the Central Committee, and Xi Jinping.” *Bitter Winter* said trainers also instructed monks and nuns to condemn four practices: *tsethar* (“merit release” of animals destined for slaughter), done in violation of government regulations on domesticated animals; fasting during Saka Dawa, the holy month connected to Buddha’s birth, enlightenment, and death; abstaining from Losar (Tibetan New Year) festivals as a form of political protest; and siding with farmers who refuse to cultivate their land to protest the suppression of Tibetan language and culture.

Local sources reported that beginning in July, authorities required monasteries and nunneries across the Tibetan plateau in the TAR and other Tibetan-inhabited areas to host “patriotic activities” in the run-up to the CCP’s 20th Party Congress in October. State media reported that on September 19, the Yunnan Provincial UFWD hosted a three-day meeting of 78 monks and nuns with the theme, “Happily welcoming the 20th Party Congress and working hard to be outstanding monks and nuns in accordance with the Party.” Discussions focused on ensuring monks and nuns practiced Tibetan Buddhism, including teaching it to others, in compliance with the national Sinicization policy and the principle of “loving the Party, the country, and socialism.”

A local source told RFA authorities ordered Buddhist monks in Ngaba, Kardze, and Golog TAPs in Sichuan and Qinghai Provinces to watch all televised session of the 20th Party Congress on October 16-22. Another Tibetan source said, “All the schools in the Ngaba, Khyungchu (Hongyuan), and Dzamthang (Rangtang) regions are instructed to watch the Party Congress meetings from the beginning.” Authorities also ordered residents in Lhasa to remain at home and watch. The source said, “A few days ahead of the meeting, one person from each family was allowed to go out to pick up groceries and other essentials, but now (during the Congress) no one is allowed to leave their home.”

According to RFA, on January 25, the government sent a directive to all provinces and municipalities in the TAR instructing that workers employed in government offices, schools, or hospitals must renounce the Dalai Lama and declare their

loyalty to the CCP as a condition of employment. One source told RFA the directive violated the constitution, which bans the state, public organizations, and individuals from compelling citizens to believe in, or not believe in, any religion and from discriminating against citizens who believe in a religion. Separately, RFA reported that in a February 22 notice from Lhasa's Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau, authorities announced zero-COVID restrictions that banned major religious activities in the Drepung, Sera, Ratreng, Sharbumpa, Sengling, Dakpo, and Tsuglakhang monasteries during the Lunar New Year.

In January, RFA reported officials in Matoe County, Golog TAP, Qinghai Province, ordered Tibetan nomads to replace prayer flags outside their camps with the national flag. A source told RFA that officials also removed some prayer flags from hilltops, saying they were not environmentally friendly, and replaced others with the national flag. A photograph accompanying the report showed four police officers, one holding a machine gun, standing next to a large upright national flag with discarded Tibetan prayer flags piled beneath it. The source said authorities also demolished furnaces used to produce smoke offerings for purification ceremonies and forced the nomads to attend "political education sessions." In September, sources told RFA that authorities in Serta (Seda) County, Sichuan Province, forbade Tibetans from hanging prayer flags in front of their homes.

In April, HRW reported that authorities attempted to conceal the death of well-known Tibetan lama Tulku Dawa, who died on January 30. Authorities reportedly arrested Dawa in 2010 at the Shag Rongbo Monastery in Nagchu Prefecture, TAR, and sentenced him to seven years in prison for seeking the Dalai Lama's guidance in selecting the reincarnation of the Rongpo Choje, the monastery's chief lama. Upon Dawa's release, authorities banned him from rejoining his monastery and effectively kept him under house arrest in Lhasa until his death. Authorities prohibited mourners outside Lhasa from attending Dawa's funeral, effectively excluding the majority of his followers and students, who were from the Shag Rongbo Monastery area. Authorities scrubbed mentions of his death from social media and stated those permitted to view the body were forbidden from taking photographs or "making trouble" on pain of "imprisonment or worse." Although authorities allowed the body to be returned to the monastery for cremation, they excluded local residents from the event and body-searched participating monks.

The media outlet Voice of Tibet reported that on December 3, authorities detained three Tibetans who were returning from visiting the Sekhar-Guthok Temple in Lhozhag County, Shannan Prefecture, TAR, near the border with Bhutan. Police accused the three – Champdui, Solang Gyatso, and Gongjue – of planning to travel to India, although sources told Voice of Tibet it was unclear if this was true.

The TAR government reportedly continued to maintain tight control over the use of Tibetan Buddhist religious relics and declared them, religious buildings, and religious institutions to be state property. Sources continued to report that while authorities permitted some traditional religious ceremonies and practices, they continued to exercise control over the activities of religious leaders and religious gatherings of laypersons, confining many such activities to officially designated places of worship and preventing monks from traveling to villages for politically sensitive events and religious ceremonies. Religious figures and laypersons continued to report difficulty traveling to monasteries outside their home regions, both within the TAR and in other parts of the country. Travelers said they encountered roadblocks and police checkpoints surrounding major monasteries, with security personnel often checking their identity cards and refusing entry to nonresidents. Tibetans wishing to visit family members residing in monasteries noted frequent refusals or limits on their ability to visit. Local sources continued to report similar restrictions on their movements and said checkpoints and fear of detention prevented them from visiting monasteries and participating in religious events. Many monks expelled from their monasteries after 2008 protests in Lhasa and other areas, such as Ngaba County, Sichuan Province, had not returned, some because of government prohibitions.

According to sources, authorities continued to restrict many major monasteries across the Tibetan Plateau from holding large-scale religious events, citing COVID-19 concerns. Local sources confirmed that many Tibetan monasteries and other religious sites were closed during the year, with authorities saying the closures were COVID-19 precautions.

RFA reported that on February 22, Lhasa authorities again cancelled public religious festivals and prayer ceremonies for Losar in March, closing major religious sites in and around the city, including the Potala Palace and multiple monasteries, citing COVID-19 restrictions. Lhasa authorities ordered Tibetans to

remain in their homes and avoid travel and gatherings during Losar. A former political prisoner living in exile told RFA this was a pretext for suppressing religious activities the government viewed as vehicles for political dissent, because Losar began on March 3, close to the anniversaries of the March 1959 Tibetan uprising and the March 2008 outbreak of unrest across the Tibetan Plateau. As in prior years, TAR authorities banned monks and nuns from leaving their monasteries and nunneries during Losar, and they heavily policed pilgrimage sites. Sources stated officials continued to urge Tibetans to report on foreign visitors to these areas and other “suspicious activities,” in accordance with a policy that has been place for many years.

Free Tibet reported in May that authorities in Lhasa increased the security presence in anticipation for the Dalai Lama’s birthday on July 6. Authorities reportedly set up new security checkpoints on street corners, flew surveillance drones over the city, and carried out random searches of Tibetans’ mobile phones for “banned content” such as photographs of the Dalai Lama. Authorities maintained checkpoints on all sides of and streets around the Jokhang Temple, Potala Palace, and Gaden, Sera, and Drepung Monasteries. Police also monitored Tibetan pilgrims carrying out devotional circumambulations around religious sites. These restrictions on gatherings and movements were also reported during other Tibetan holidays and religious celebrations during the year. RFA reported in July that some Tibetans were able to covertly celebrate the Dalai Lama’s birthday.

Bitter Winter reported authorities on July 6 launched a “smear campaign” against the Dalai Lama. In Lhasa and other cities, the CCP mounted an exhibition depicting the Dalai Lama as an anti-Buddhist and anti-religious figure and said prior to the Communist “liberation” of Tibet, the Dalai Lama’s administration had kept people in slave-like conditions. Authorities reportedly forced school students to attend mandatory classes on the theme, “Explaining and Criticizing the Reactionary Nature of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama.” Police summoned family members of the students who failed to attend. According to *Bitter Winter*, in schools, whiteboards bore slogans such as “Students who believe in religion are disloyal to the Party” and “Party members do not believe in any religion.”

In August, the government again banned the annual Dechen Shedrub prayer festival at the site of the former Larung Gar Tibetan Buddhist Institute. Authorities cited overcrowding and COVID-19 concerns as reasons for the ban.

The ban marked the seventh consecutive year the government prohibited the festival from taking place.

Local authorities continued to invoke regulations concerning safeguarding national unity and responding to “religious extremism” as justification for monitoring individuals, groups, and institutions and punishing adherents of religious leaders such as the Dalai Lama. According to media reports, the Ministry of Public Security also used tens of millions of surveillance cameras throughout the country to monitor the general public. Human rights groups stated authorities increasingly relied on the cameras and other forms of surveillance to monitor and intimidate political dissidents, religious leaders, and adherents. These included facial recognition and “gait recognition” video surveillance, allowing police not only to monitor a situation but also to quickly identify individuals in crowds.

Asian News International (ANI) reported in February that authorities continued to surveil and restrict the movement of Geshe Tsewang Namgyal, a former monk from Draggo Monastery in Kardze TAP, Sichuan Province. Namgyal served six years in prison for his participation in a peaceful protest against PRC rule in 2012. Authorities released him in 2018 due to his failing health but prohibited him from returning to Draggo Monastery, owning a mobile phone, taking part in gatherings, traveling, or seeking medical treatment without prior permission.

Sources continued to report party leaders and branches of the UFWD, SARA, and BAC stationed party and government officials, including security agents, in monasteries in Tibetan areas. Provincial, prefectural, county, and local governments continued to establish police stations or security offices adjacent to or on the premises of many monasteries and nunneries. Sources estimated that in 2018 (the most recent information available), more than 15,000 government employees were working in approximately 3,000 Tibetan monasteries.

According to human rights groups and local sources, authorities continued to install overt camera surveillance systems at monasteries. The NGO Freedom House released a report in September entitled *Beijing’s Global Media Influence 2022: Authoritarian Expansion and the Power of Democratic Resilience*. The report stated authorities implemented “new and more sinister tactics” to conduct extensive surveillance and restrict travel to sensitive locations such as Tibet.

These included expelling or otherwise harassing foreign correspondents and harassing and filing “questionable lawsuits” against sources who agreed to be interviewed. Freedom House stated authorities had increased use of these measures since the outbreak of COVID-19. The report stated officials increasingly used intimidation to silence members of the Tibetan diaspora community abroad who spoke out against human rights abuses in the region. The report noted government hackers “targeted overseas Tibetan and Chinese-language websites that were critical of the CCP, especially during politically sensitive periods, temporarily disabling their websites and increasing costs for what are already cash-strapped outlets.”

In September, the University of Toronto’s Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy published a study that found the government had collected DNA samples from between one-quarter and one-third of Tibet’s population since June 2016. Analyzing 100 publicly available sources, including social media posts and government sources, the study found police “targeted men, women, and children for DNA collection outside of any ongoing criminal investigation. In some cases, police have targeted Buddhist monks.” The study stated, “Monks are important pillars of Tibetan society and have participated in protests against the Chinese government and state policy.... In response, authorities have sought to discipline Tibet’s monastic community through surveillance, arrests, and prosecutions. It is therefore not surprising that police have also targeted monks for DNA collection. In Chamdo [Prefecture, TAR], data collection reportedly included the region’s 78 temples and religious sites.” The study cited as one example a Yangzhuo Public Security Bureau posting on WeChat stating that on May 18-19, police from the Tallinn Qudi Temple Police station in NaKardze (Langkazi) County, Shannan Prefecture, TAR, collected blood samples from monks as part of what bureau officials called efforts “to continuously improve the DNA database of public security organs.” The University of Toronto study concluded, “Without checks on police powers, police in Tibet will be free to use a completed mass DNA database for whatever purpose they see fit” and that “DNA data stored in a population database could also be used to justify the arrest, prosecution, and detention of government critics, civil society activists, monks, and ordinary people.”

HRW also reported in September that “mass DNA collection drives appear[ed] to be taking place in all seven prefectures or municipalities in the TAR.” According to HRW, state media described these drives as one of several ongoing efforts to

“strengthen the grass-roots social governance system,” primarily by increasing police presence at the village level. HWR said Tibetans did not appear to have the right to refuse to provide blood samples. The HRW report cited a Lhasa municipality report stating, “Blood samples for DNA collection were being systematically collected from children at kindergartens and from other local residents.” HRW’s China director said, “The Chinese government is already subjecting Tibetans to pervasive repression. Now the authorities are literally taking blood without consent to strengthen their surveillance capabilities.”

According to multiple sources in the TAR and in other Tibetan areas, officials continued to maintain a watch list of family members, relatives, and close friends of self-immolators to prevent them from meeting and communicating with international visitors, and, in some cases, deprived them of public benefits.

Human rights groups stated authorities continued to use the Regulations on the Establishment of a Model Area for Ethnic Unity and Progress in the Tibet Autonomous Region, adopted in 2020, to further impose central government control and Han culture on the Tibetan population and encourage Tibetans to inform on their neighbors, including those deemed to have “undermined national religious policies. According to ICT, “Pressure on individual Tibetans to report on their neighbors is intensified by the widespread use of surveillance technologies. If cameras and facial recognition algorithms pick up activity deemed suspicious, those who witnessed it, yet failed to report it, also fall under suspicion, and may face interrogation at length.”

According to human rights groups and media sources, authorities frequently checked mobile phones for pictures of the Dalai Lama and other content that was considered sensitive. There were reports authorities surveilled individuals for years after finding such material.

Human rights groups and local sources reported that during the year, authorities continued to expand the requirement that families replace images of the Dalai Lama and other lamas in their homes with portraits of preeminent CCP leaders, including Chairman Mao and President Xi. According to local sources, authorities required all monasteries, schools, and offices in the TAR and Tibetan areas to display pictures of CCP leaders and the national flag. Sources said authorities conducted inspections to check for compliance.

In addition to the prohibition on the open veneration of the Dalai Lama, including the display of his photograph, the government continued to ban pictures of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, whom the Dalai Lama and nearly all Tibetan Buddhists recognize as the 11th Panchen Lama. In some counties of the TAR, punishments for displaying images of the Dalai Lama included expulsion from monasteries. Local sources told RFA that officials from government bureaus monitoring religious practice visited Tibetan schools and warned teachers and students not to keep or display photographs of the Dalai Lama.

In addition to the PRC's national "Measures for the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services" that came into effect March 1, in May, TAR Cyberspace Administration announced specific "rectification" measures for the region to address threats such as "undermining national religious policies and promoting harmful information such as cults and feudal superstitions." The measures urged citizens to report online live webcasts and short videos containing illegal content to a government email address or telephone tip line.

In its *Freedom in the World 2022* report, Freedom House stated, "Tibetan cultural expression, which the authorities associate with separatism, is subject to especially harsh restrictions.... Deliberate internet blackouts occur periodically in Tibet, including in areas where public demonstrations have occurred. International broadcasts are jammed, and personal communication devices are confiscated and searched. The online censorship and monitoring systems in place across China are applied more stringently in the TAR, while censorship of Tibet-related keywords on the popular messaging application WeChat has become more sophisticated."

Tibetan rights organizations and media reported authorities continued to destroy religious monuments across the region and to arrest individuals who protested. RFA reported in January that authorities in Dartsedo in Kardze TAP, Sichuan Province, seized a life-sized devotional statue of well-known Tibetan lama Tulku Tenzin Delek Rinpoche. Tenzin, whom supporters said authorities wrongfully convicted of bombing a public square in Chengdu City, Sichuan Province, in 2002, died in prison in 2015 while serving a life sentence. Sources said authorities arrested several individuals who were allegedly involved in the building and transportation of the statue to Lithang, Tenzin's home county. Authorities also raided Tenzin's family home in Lithang, ransacked the family's home shrine, and

detained Dolkar Lhamo and two other family members for 18 days, during which authorities beat and questioned them about the statue. Dolkar Lhamo's daughter, who lives abroad, told RFA, "During my last conversation with my mother,... she asked me not to get in touch with her anymore, as she had been threatened with severe consequences by the Chinese police if she talked with me."

Local sources told RFA that in January, authorities in Drago County, Kardze TAP, Sichuan Province, arrested three Tibetans – Asang, Dodra, and Nortso – for being in "possession of sensitive information." Authorities searched their mobile phones and found photographs and videos of the December 2021 destruction of a 99-foot Maitreya Buddha statue. RFA reported authorities forced monks from local monasteries and Tibetans living nearby to witness the demolition of the statue and 45 traditional prayer wheels erected near Drogo Monastery and beat individuals who protested. A source told Tibet Watch that in April, authorities forced local monks to sign a letter saying it was they, rather than government forces, who destroyed the statue. Tibet Watch subsequently confirmed the destruction via comparison of before-and-after commercial satellite imagery.

In January, RFA used commercial satellite imagery to verify the destruction of a three-story statue of Maitreya Buddha at Gaden Namyal Ling Monastery in Drago County, Kardze TAP, Sichuan Province. This was the second giant Buddha statue destroyed by authorities at that monastery in December 2021. Authorities said the temple housing the Maitreya statue needed to be torn down because it lacked a fire escape. Local sources said Drago County chief Wang Dongsheng was present at the demolition and witnessed police beating locals who protested.

ANI reported in January that authorities in Kardze TAP, Sichuan Province, arrested 11 monks from Gaden Namgyal Ling Monastery for sharing news and photographs of the destruction of a different 99-foot Buddha statue with individuals outside Tibet. According to ANI and RFA, those arrested included Lhamo Yangkyi, Tsering Samdrup, Pelga, Nyima, and Tashi Dorje, and six others whose names were not released. Local sources told RFA an official said the monks "need[ed] to be taught a lesson" and that one of the monks was badly beaten. In February, RFA reported that authorities had destroyed the statue for "being built too high," noting that it was the third such statue destroyed in three months.

Free Tibet reported in February that the military in November 2021 destroyed the 45-foot statue of 8th-century Tantric master guru Padmasambhava near Chanang Monastery in Shara Thang Nyimo Township, Drago Country, Kardze TAP, Sichuan Province. Free Tibet said the communication clampdown in the region meant news of the demolition did not become public for several months.

Multiple sources reported the government continued to interfere in the religious education of laypersons and children. Authorities restricted children from attending traditional religious festivals or from going on pilgrimages during school holidays. TAR 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. The ban on religious education was also implemented in some places outside of the TAR.

The Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy reported in April that authorities ordered the closure of six Tibetan-language private schools in Sershul (Shiqu) County, Kardze TAP, Sichuan Province. Authorities forced the students from these schools to enroll in other institutions that taught classes in Mandarin only and that did not include Tibetan history, culture, and religion in the supplemental curriculum. Although several local families submitted petitions requesting authorities to reverse the order, authorities threatened those who resisted with prison. The NGO said the closure of these schools aligned with the government's broader strategy to build a "Chinese national identity" with a single language.

In May, the NGO Tibet Action Institute reported authorities maintained an expansive system of mandatory boarding preschools for an estimated 100,000 children ages four to six. Gyal Lo, a Tibetan education expert living abroad and cited in the report, visited 50 boarding preschools at which these children were required to spend five days a week. The NGO stated the students were "immersed in Chinese language [and] intentionally cut off from learning their mother tongue at a time when this linguistic foundation is needed the most for their development." Lo told the Tibet Action Institute, "It is outright cruelty to separate children from their parents, especially at this extremely young age. Not only is China tearing families apart, they [sic] are forcing these vulnerable children to become strangers to their own Tibetan culture, severing their spiritual, linguistic, and cultural ties to their homes and communities." Lo described these

schools as places of political indoctrination where teachers urged students to “identify and reimagine themselves as Chinese, first and foremost. They engage in Chinese cultural performances as well as war reenactments, dressed in People’s Liberation Army uniforms or Red Army suits.” Lo said, “I saw in my own family how within three months of being sent to boarding preschool, children began to speak to each other only in Chinese, even though they had been raised speaking Tibetan. When the children went home on weekends, they stayed silent in the house, almost acting like guests.”

A Tibet Action Institute report published in 2021 stated nearly 80 percent of all Tibetan students between the ages of six and 18 – approximately 800,000 – were forced to attend state-run boarding schools where they received a “highly politicized education, primarily in Chinese.” Lo told the Tibet Action Institute that authorities made even Tibetan schools emphasize Han culture. Lo said, “In one primary school with a preschool attached to it, authorities told the Tibetan principal that the school must remove from the classroom walls depictions of Tibetan historical figures and cultural heroes, Tibetan imagery, and Tibetan script, and replace them with photographs of Chairman Mao and Deng Xiaoping, famous Chinese phrases, and so forth.”

The government continued to maintain that Gyaltsen Norbu, whom it selected in 1995, was the Panchen Lama’s true reincarnation, and not Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, whom authorities disappeared that same year. Norbu remained the vice president of, and highest-ranking Tibetan in, the government-affiliated BAC. According to numerous Tibetan Buddhist monks and scholars, SARA and provincial religious affairs bureau officials frequently pressured monks and laypersons, including government officials, to attend religious study sessions presided by Norbu.

In accordance with official guidelines for monastery management, leadership of and membership in committees and working groups continued to be restricted to individuals the guidelines described as “politically reliable, patriotic, and devoted monks, nuns, and party and government officials.” General administrative affairs in all monasteries in the TAR and in many major monasteries in other Tibetan areas, which monks traditionally managed, continued instead to be overseen by monastery management committees and monastic government working groups,

both of which were composed primarily of government officials and CCP members, in addition to a few government-approved monks.

The traditional monastic system reportedly continued to decline, as many senior Buddhist teachers from Tibet remained or died in India or elsewhere abroad. The heads of most major schools of Tibetan Buddhism – including the Dalai Lama, Karmapa, Sakya Trizin, and Khatok Getse Rinpoche, as well as Bon leader Kyabje Menr Trizin – all continued to reside abroad. The government also banned India-trained Tibetan monks, most of whom received their education from the Dalai Lama or those with ties to him, from teaching in Tibetan monasteries in China. Religious leaders continued to report that authorities incentivized lamas and monks to leave monastic life voluntarily, by emphasizing positive attributes of secular life, as compared to the more disciplined and austere religious life. Monastery leaders cited continued revisions to education policies, religion regulations, and government control of monastery management as reasons for the declining number of young monks. Religious leaders and scholars continued to say these and other means of interference continued to cause them concern about the ability of religious traditions to survive for successive generations.

As in previous years, senior monks at some monasteries continued to report informal agreements with local officials whereby resident monks would not stage protests or commit self-immolations as long as the government adopted a hands-off approach to the management of their monasteries. Sources said authorities monitored all financial transactions involving monasteries inside Tibet and entities abroad.

According to media and NGO reports, the CCP continued to maintain a list of state-approved “living buddhas.” In 2018, the BAC announced its database contained 1,311 “living buddhas” it deemed “authentic.” The Dalai Lama was reportedly not on the list. The database reportedly overlapped with the database required by the 2021 Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy, which also included monks who were not “living buddhas.” According to sources, every individual on the official reincarnation database received political training in state ideology, entirely separate from religious training, that emphasized that their career and role in the religious community depended on motivating followers “to love the Party, love the country and social stability maintenance work, as well as fight against ‘separatism’ and the Dalai Lama.”

Sources said the state required monks and nuns to demonstrate – in addition to competence in religious studies – “political reliability,” “moral integrity capable of impressing the public,” and a willingness to “play an active role at critical moments.” According to media reports, the state required all monks and nuns to participate in several sessions of “legal education” per year, during which they had to denounce the Dalai Lama, express allegiance to the government-recognized Panchen Lama, study President Xi’s speeches, study Mandarin, and hear lectures praising the leadership of the CCP and the socialist system.

Authorities continued to ban minors younger than 18 from participating in monastic training. Multiple sources reported authorities forced underage monks and nuns to leave their monasteries and Buddhist schools to receive “patriotic education.” Journalists reported police arrested, and in some cases beat, underage monks who refused to cooperate and that officials threatened parents and other family members with loss of social benefits if underage monks did not comply.

Local sources said that while Mandarin and Tibetan were both official languages of the TAR, official buildings and businesses, including banks, post offices, and hospitals, frequently lacked signage in Tibetan. In many instances, forms and documents were available only in Mandarin. Mandarin was used for most official communications in many Tibetan areas.

In April, RFA reported that during the year, Han officials in rural Tibetan areas began forcing village leaders and local administrators to “lead by example” in using Mandarin. A source told RFA that authorities in Kongpo (Nyingtri) Prefecture, TAR, held a 10-day workshop for local leaders to promote written and spoken Mandarin as their main language of communication. The source said this was one of six workshops held in the area.

Due to the PRC’s zero-COVID restrictions, most individuals were unable to travel abroad during the year, including for religious purposes. In past years, individuals reported continued difficulties traveling to India to receive religious training, meet with religious leaders, or visit family members living in monasteries. In many cases, Public Security Bureau officials refused to approve their passport applications. In other cases, prospective travelers were able to obtain passports only after paying bribes to local officials. Some individuals seeking to travel said

they could only obtain passports after promising not to travel to India or not to criticize government policies in Tibetan areas while overseas. In some cases, officials required family members to sign a guarantee that passport applicants would return from their travel. According to local sources, numerous Tibetans in Gansu, Qinghai, and Sichuan Provinces waited up to 10 years to receive a passport, often without any explanation for the delay. There were also instances of authorities confiscating and canceling previously issued passports, reportedly as a way of preventing Tibetans from participating in religious events in India involving the Dalai Lama.

In April, the NGO Human Rights Protection Network (HRPN) reported many Tibetan families continued to face harassment and persecution for maintaining contact with their relatives living in exile. The NGO stated authorities continued the “Crackdown on Gangs and Evils” campaign, begun in 2018, to suppress communications between Tibetans living in China and their relatives living abroad. HRPN stated some Tibetans living in China were sentenced for “illegal business operations” because they sent donations to Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in India and Nepal. In November, RFA reported authorities sentenced monks Sonam Gyatso and Rachung Gendun to two and three years in prison, respectively, for sending donations to the Dalai Lama and Kirti Rinpoche, the abbot of their monastery, both living in exile in India. Authorities arrested the men separately in 2021 and held them incommunicado for more than one year before announcing their sentences.

In past years, Tibetans who traveled to Nepal and planned to continue to India reported that PRC officials visited their families’ homes in Tibet and threatened their relatives if they did not return immediately. Sichuan Province and TAR officials continued to require religious travelers returning from India to attend political training sessions. According to sources, in recent years, these restrictions had prevented thousands of Tibetans from attending religious training in India.

Restrictions remained in place for monks and nuns living abroad, particularly those in India, which made it difficult or impossible for them to travel into Tibetan areas.

According to sources, authorities in some areas continued to enforce special restrictions on Tibetans staying at hotels inside and outside the TAR. Police

regulations forbade some hotels and guesthouses in the TAR from accepting Tibetan guests, particularly monks and nuns, and they required other hotels to notify police departments when Tibetan guests checked in.

Government officials regularly denigrated the Dalai Lama publicly and accused a “Dalai clique” and other “outside forces” of instigating Tibetan protests, stating such acts were attempts to “split” China.

State media continued to promote government-recognized Panchen Lama Gyaltzen Norbu. The state-run *People’s Daily* reported that on February 23, You Quan, secretary of the Secretariat of the CCP Central Committee and head of the Central UFWD, met with Norbu in Beijing. You praised Norbu’s efforts to “Sinicize” Tibetan Buddhism. Norbu expressed his support for the CCP’s Central Committee, with “Comrade Xi Jinping” as the Party’s “core.”

During an April 26 press conference, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) spokesperson Wang Wenbin said, “Regarding the reincarnation of the Dalai, Panchen, and other great living Buddhas, a complete approach and procedure has been developed over the centuries, which requires following historical custom, religious rituals, and complying with Chinese laws.”

In a May press conference, MFA spokesperson Zhao Lijian called the India-based CTA an “outright separatist group” and asserted that the Dalai Lama was in “political exile under the guise of religion.” Zhao claimed the Dalai Lama had “long been engaged in anti-China separatist activities and attempting to split Tibet from China.”

During a July press conference, MFA spokesperson Zhao said, “China is firmly opposed to the contact between official figures of any country and the Dalai Lama.” He urged the United States “to fully understand the importance and sensitivity of Tibet issues” and to “refrain from any form of contact with the Dalai Lama.”

In March, in an interview with state-run *Xinhua*, Gyaltzen Norbu stated, “It is an unequivocal mission for us [religious leaders] to uphold the leadership of the CCP without hesitation.”

Authorities continued to justify in state media their interference with Tibetan Buddhist monasteries by associating the monasteries with “separatism” and pro-independence activities.

On May 23-28, then UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet visited parts of China but did not go to Tibet. At a press conference on May 28, Bachelet said, “On the Tibet Autonomous Region, it is important the linguistic, religious, and cultural identity of Tibetans be protected, and that Tibetan people are allowed to participate fully and freely in decisions about their religious life and for dialogue to take place. I discussed education policies in the Tibet Autonomous Region and stressed the importance of children learning in their own language and culture in the setting of their families or communities.” Human rights groups criticized Bachelet for not visiting the TAR or other Tibetan regions in China, noted she did not address education policies being imposed on areas with sizeable Tibetan populations outside the TAR, and expressed disappointment that she was not more critical of the government. ICT said, “Bachelet’s only two sentences on the situation in Tibet are utterly unacceptable and severely erode human rights standards and institutions.”

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Tibetans, particularly those who wore traditional and religious attire, regularly reported being denied hotel rooms, refused service by taxi drivers, and discriminated against in employment and in business transactions.

Many Han Buddhists continued to demonstrate interest in Tibetan Buddhism and donated money to Tibetan monasteries and nunneries, according to local sources in such monasteries and nunneries. In addition, a growing number of Han Buddhists visited Tibetan monasteries, although officials sometimes imposed restrictions that made it difficult for Han Buddhists to conduct long-term study at many monasteries in Tibetan areas. State propaganda reported on these activities.

Tibetan Buddhist monks sometimes visited cities outside the TAR to provide religious instruction to Han Buddhists. *Bitter Winter* reported that in July, the BAC of the prefecture-level city of Yunfu, Guangdong Province, issued a “Notice on the Boycott of Illegal Missionary Activities of Tibetan Buddhist Monks.” The notice

indicated that some Tibetan monks “came to our city to teach the Dharma illegally,” and it encouraged all Buddhist religious organizations to “immediately report the presence of Tibetan monks,” saying such monks were supporting “separatist activities” under the guise of providing religious instruction. The notice said, “Those who violate the precepts of Chinese Buddhism by studying and participating in Tibetan Buddhist activities will be dealt with according to the national religious policy.”

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The PRC continued to tightly restrict diplomatic access to the TAR. No U.S. diplomats visited the TAR or TAPs during the year.

U.S. officials repeatedly raised concerns about religious freedom in Tibet with Chinese government counterparts at multiple levels. U.S. officials, including the Secretary of State, Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues, the Ambassador, and other Department of State and embassy officials continued sustained and concerted efforts to advocate the rights of Tibetans to preserve, practice, teach, and develop their religious traditions and language without interference from the government. Embassy officials regularly expressed concerns to the Chinese government at senior levels regarding the severe restrictions imposed on Tibetans’ ability to exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms, including religious freedom and cultural rights. Embassy officials pressed PRC officials on the government’s refusal to engage in dialogue with the Dalai Lama. U.S. officials continued to underscore that only the Dalai Lama and other faith leaders could decide the succession of the Dalai Lama, and they also raised concerns about the disappearance of the Panchen Lama, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima. U.S. officials expressed concern and sought further information about individual cases and incidents of religious persecution and discrimination.

During the year, the U.S. government used a variety of diplomatic tools to promote religious freedom and accountability in Tibet, including continuing visa restrictions on PRC 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.

On January 13, the Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues gave an interview to RFA Tibetan Service in which she condemned the PRC government's efforts to Sinicize Tibetan Buddhism and interfere with the veneration of Tibetan Buddhist leaders, including the Dalai Lama.

On March 4, the Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues led a Department of State-hosted virtual Losar celebration, bringing together representatives from the CTA, community leaders, NGOs, and U.S. government officials. At the event, she called on the PRC "to cease its harassment, intimidation, and surveillance of Tibetan diaspora communities ... and stop its practice of punishing family members living in the PRC in retaliation." She also urged PRC authorities to allow U.S. diplomats and other officials, journalists, and tourists to enter the TAR and other Tibetan areas unhindered, "to see for themselves how Tibetans live, work, worship, and celebrate their culture." The Secretary of State released a press statement to mark the occasion in which he said, "We are unwavering in our commitment to helping Tibetans preserve their cultural, linguistic, and religious heritage, which we honor today."

On April 25, the U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom and the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor spoke at a reception hosted by the Office of Tibet in Washington, D.C. to mark the 33rd birthday of the 11th Panchen Lama. They reaffirmed the U.S. government's support for Tibetans' human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of religion or belief. Also on April 25, the State Department spokesperson stated, "We urge PRC authorities to account for Gedhun Choekyi Nyima's whereabouts and well-being immediately and to allow him to fully exercise his human rights and fundamental freedoms, in line with the PRC's international commitments. The United States supports Tibetans' religious freedom and their unique religious, cultural, and linguistic identity, including Tibetans' right to select, educate, and venerate their own leaders, like the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama, according to their own beliefs and without government interference." The Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues also publicly called on the PRC to release the Panchen Lama.

On May 18, the Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues met with the Dalai Lama and the CTA in Dharamsala, India, to discuss issues pertaining to Tibet and Tibetans.

On July 6, the Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues participated in an NGO-hosted celebration of the Dalai Lama's birthday in Washington DC.

On September 30, the Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues celebrated the 20th anniversary of the bipartisan Tibetan Policy Act and reaffirmed the United States government's commitment to help the Tibetan community preserve its distinct religious, cultural, and linguistic heritage.

On October 4, at an event hosted by the U.S. Mission in Geneva on the human rights implications of the Dalai Lama's succession, the Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues said, "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.... We will explore all tools at our disposal to promote accountability for PRC officials who interfere in the Dalai Lama's succession, and we will urge our likeminded partners to do the same. 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 PRC interference in this process. Lastly, to address the long-standing grievances of the Tibetan community, we will continue to urge the PRC government to return to meaningful dialogue with the Dalai Lama or his representatives, without preconditions."

On October 6, the Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues tweeted, "two years ago, the PRC detained Tibetan monk Go Sherab Gyatso and later sentenced him to 10 years in prison. On this anniversary, the United States renews our call for his immediate & unconditional release and affirms our support for the human rights of all Tibetans."

Although U.S. officials were unable to travel to the TAR during the year, they maintained contact with a wide range of religious leaders and practitioners to monitor the status of religious freedom.

The embassy and consulates general used social media to deliver direct messaging about religious freedom in Tibet to millions of Chinese citizens. In July, the embassy posted the Secretary of State's remarks to PRC State Councilor and

Foreign Minister Wang Yi, noting that the Secretary “relayed our concerns about the repression of freedom in Hong Kong, forced labor, the treatment of ethnic and religious minorities in Tibet, the genocide in Xinjiang.” In November, the embassy highlighted that the U.S. President raised concerns about PRC practices in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong in his meeting with President Xi in Bali, Indonesia; PRC censors quickly censored related posts on WeChat and Weibo.