



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Secretary Blinken concerned about Tibetan mass DNA collection

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Secretary of State Antony Blinken has publicly expressed concerns about reports of China gathering DNA from Tibetans, making him the senior-most US official to raise the issue to date.

As the featured speaker at Freedom House's annual Freedom Awards on May 9, 2023, [Blinken stated](#): "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."

In September 2022, Citizen Lab reported that China's police may have gathered about 920,000 to 1.2 million DNA samples in the Tibet Autonomous Region—which spans around half of traditional Tibet—over the prior six years. Those figures represent one-quarter to one-third of the region's total population.

That same month, Human Rights Watch said that China's authorities were systematically collecting DNA from residents of the TAR, including by taking blood from children as young as 5 without their parents' consent.

Blinken's statement met with an accusatory response from China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson. However, the International Campaign for Tibet welcomed the Secretary's remarks.

"Throughout its brutal occupation of Tibet, China has used Tibet as a laboratory for relentless methods of social control, including this [horrific campaign of mass DNA collection](#)," said ICT, an advocacy group based in Washington, DC and Europe.

"The best way to protect Tibetans from China's authoritarian rule is to push for a peaceful resolution to China's illegal occupation of Tibet. The US can and must do that by passing the [bipartisan Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Conflict Act](#) that is currently in both houses of Congress."

[Watch Blinken's remarks on mass DNA collection in Tibet at the Freedom Awards.](#)

Mass DNA collection in Tibet

According to [Citizen Lab](#), China's DNA collection program is unrelated to criminal justice. "[O]ur analysis indicates that for years police across Tibet have collected DNA samples from men, women, and children, none of whom appear to be criminal suspects," Citizen Lab says in its report.

Police are also not targeting specific groups like activists or government critics. Instead, they are collecting DNA from entire communities.

Similarly, [Human Rights Watch](#) says in its report that, “There is no publicly available evidence suggesting people can decline to participate” in the DNA collection, “or that police have credible evidence of criminal conduct that might warrant such collection.”

Some of Human Rights Watch’s most disturbing findings involve blood collection from children. That includes the taking of blood from kindergarten students in Tibet’s capital of Lhasa, and the collection of DNA from all boys ages 5 and older in a Tibetan township of Qinghai province.

[Learn more about China’s reported mass DNA collection in Tibet.](#)

China’s response

At a press briefing today, May 10, China’s Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin responded to a question about Blinken’s remarks by claiming they “mean nothing except manufacturing sensational news items.”

Wang then accused the US military of collecting genomic data of Chinese, Arabs and “European Aryans.”

While Wang dismissed the reports of mass DNA collection in Tibet during his press conference, China [does not allow journalists to travel to Tibet to report freely](#) on the Chinese government’s activities there and verify Wang’s claims.

Lack of freedom in Tibet

In September 2022, Under Secretary of State Uzra Zeya, who serves as the US Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues, [tweeted that she was “\[d\]eeply disturbed” by the reports.](#)

“We call on the [People’s Republic of China] to stop these repressive policies and respect the fundamental freedoms of Tibetans,” Zeya tweeted.

Freedom House, the watchdog group that held the Freedom Awards, has also raised consistent alarms about China’s abuses in Tibet.

The organization previously honored the Dalai Lama at the awards. In 1991, it [presented the Tibetan spiritual leader](#) with the Advancing Human Liberty Award.

Earlier this year, Freedom House [rated Tibet as the least-free country on Earth](#) alongside South Sudan and Syria in its Global Freedom rankings.

This was the third year in a row that Tibet was at the bottom of the global freedom scores.

Resolving the Tibet-China conflict

China has [illegally occupied Tibet for over 60 years](#), forcing the Dalai Lama into exile in 1959.

Earlier this year, Democrats and Republicans in both chambers of Congress reintroduced a bill that can help peacefully resolve the occupation.

The Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Conflict Act will pressure China to resume negotiations with the Dalai Lama’s envoys for the first time since dialogue between the two sides stalled in 2010.

The legislation will recognize that Tibetans have the right to self-determination and that Tibet's legal status is yet to be determined under international law.

[Learn more about the Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Conflict Act.](#)



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