



## INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

# Canadian parliamentarians urge sanctions over Tibet residential schools

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Canadian parliamentarians in an international human rights subcommittee are calling for sanctions against Chinese government officials responsible for a coercive boarding school system that has separated the vast majority of Tibetan schoolchildren from their families, language and culture.

The Canadian government should “utilize the Special Economic Measures Act to sanction government officials who are responsible for the implementation of the residential boarding school and preschool system in Tibet,” the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development says in a new report.

The report adds that Canada should “openly support all initiatives to keep the issue of Tibet residential schools and other violations of minority rights at the forefront of discussions at the United Nations Human Rights Council and other international fora,” as well as release a statement echoing the [concerns UN experts raised about the residential schools](#) in a November 2022 letter to the Chinese government.

According to the report, the schools have allegedly cut nearly 1 million Tibetan children off from their families and forced them to learn in Mandarin Chinese.

As a result, Tibetan children are losing the ability to communicate with their parents and grandparents and learn about their traditions, history and Tibetan identity.

The psychological toll this is taking on the students and their families is enormous.

“The harm that the schools are causing to Tibetan children, families and communities must be condemned by every possible means,” the report says.

China has illegally occupied Tibet for over 60 years, [turning it into the least-free country on Earth today](#) alongside South Sudan and Syria.

## Residential schools

The report’s publication follows two meetings the subcommittee held with witnesses including Tibet Action Institute’s Lhadon Tethong and Tenzin Dorjee, Human Rights Watch’s Sophie Richardson and Tibetan education expert Gyal Lo, who said that boarding schools have operated in Tibet since 1979 but have expanded under Chinese President Xi Jinping to include preschool children.

Gyal Lo said 100,000 Tibetan children ages 4 to 6 currently attend one of more than 50 boarding preschools. The long-term implications of this policy are hard to overstate: According to Gyal Lo’s research, preschool boarding school students lose their ability to speak in Tibetan after three to six months at a school where Chinese is the dominant language.

Another 800,000—or 78%—of all Tibetan children ages 6 to 18 are also enrolled in residential schools.

“Local options for schooling in Tibet have been systematically shuttered,” the report says, “while the residential schools have phased out Tibetan language instruction and Tibetan-produced curriculum materials in favour of those employing Han Chinese language and cultural resources and teachers.”

Some parents in rural areas try to resist separation from their children by moving to urban areas where day schools are located. However, this disrupts their ability to practice their traditional nomadic lifestyle.

Lhadon Tethong said the family separation policy is an intentional effort by China’s government “to isolate children from their families so as to erase their Tibetan identities and replace it with a Chinese identity.” The schools reportedly do not teach Tibetan history and force children to sing the Chinese national song whenever they enter.

Tenzin Dorjee warned that within one generation, “the majority of the Tibetan population will be speaking to each other in Chinese, not in Tibetan.”

“There is something disturbing when Tibetans talk to each other in Chinese as their main language,” he said.

Gyal Lo will soon discuss China’s assimilation policies and language eradication with European parliamentarians, diplomats, journalists and others during a [trip to Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy](#) organized by the Tibetan exile government offices in Brussels and Geneva and the International Campaign for Tibet.

In addition, the Office of Tibet in Washington, DC recently concluded an official visit to Ottawa to meet with Canadian parliamentarians and government officials. Namgyal Choedup, Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Central Tibetan Administration to North America, was joined by Sherap Therchin, Executive Director of the Canada Tibet Committee, which coordinated the three-day official engagements.

## **Recommendations for Canadian government**

The report, released June 16, follows concerns raised about the residential school system by officials at the [UN](#) and in the [Czech Republic](#), [Germany](#) and the [United States](#).

The report includes 18 recommendations for the Canadian government. One of those is to “sanction government officials who are responsible for the implementation of the residential boarding school and preschool system in Tibet, including the provincial party secretary in Tibet, and the architects responsible for designing and implementing the residential boarding school system.”

In addition, Canada should appoint a Special Coordinator for Tibet, the report says. The [US has had a Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues](#) since 1997.

Canada should also pursue a resumption of dialogue between Chinese and Tibetan leaders, the report adds. The [US Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Conflict Act](#), currently in Congress, will pressure Chinese leaders to get back to the negotiating table for the first time since 2010.

The report also calls on Canada to push China for information on the whereabouts and wellbeing of the Panchen Lama, the Tibetan Buddhist leader whom [China kidnapped in 1995 when he was just 6 years old](#).

Canada should also do more to prevent China's [transnational repression of Tibetans in exile](#), welcome Tibetan refugees and support Tibetan language preservation outside of Tibet, the report says.

The report adds that Canada “is particularly well-positioned to lead” on the issue of Tibetan residential schools because of “the major harms caused by its own twentieth century system of residential schools designed to assimilate Indigenous populations into the majority Euro-Canadian population.”

The Chinese government “attempted to discredit Canada’s position on human rights issues as a result of these historical abuses,” the report says. “But Canada’s ambassador to the UN, Bob Rae, has made the following distinction: ‘We (Canada) have established commissions of accountability. We have established commissions of Truth and Reconciliation. Where are the commissions of truth and reconciliation in China?’”

[Read the Canadian subcommittee report.](#)



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