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THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION OF TIBETANS AND THE CHINESE RESIDENTIAL BOARDING SCHOOL AND PRESCHOOL SYSTEM

**Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs
and International Development**

Ali Ehsassi, Chair

Subcommittee on International Human Rights

Sameer Zuberi, Chair

**JUNE 2023
44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION**

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**Ali Ehsassi
Chair**

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Reports from committees presented to the House of Commons

Presenting a report to the House is the way a committee makes public its findings and recommendations on a particular topic. Substantive reports on a subject-matter study usually contain a synopsis of the testimony heard, the recommendations made by the committee, as well as the reasons for those recommendations.

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THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

has the honour to present its

NINETEENTH REPORT

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(2), the Subcommittee on International Human Rights has studied the Chinese government's residential boarding schools and preschools in the Tibet autonomous regions and all Tibetan autonomous prefectures and counties and has agreed to report the following:

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SUMMARY

Tibet has long been a region of concern for human rights advocates since the loss of its status as an independent state in 1951 and its takeover by the People's Republic of China (PRC). As an ethnic minority within the PRC, Tibetans have, for the most part, continued to maintain robust and distinct cultural, religious, and linguistic traditions. However, these traditions are under increasing threat from assimilationist policies imposed on the region by the Government of the PRC. Recently, new information regarding structured assimilation through the residential school system in Tibet has raised concerns in the international community of serious human rights violations.

In response to this growing international concern, the House of Commons Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development held a study on the residential school system in Tibet. Over the course of two meetings, the Subcommittee heard from eight witnesses, including Tibetan rights activists, academics and human rights experts.

Witnesses described how the PRC is exerting increasing control in Tibet through policies of sinicization that are targeting areas such as religion, the traditional Tibetan nomadic lifestyle and language. Testimony suggested that this is symptomatic of a larger PRC agenda that violates minority rights in Tibet and across the country. Language is being most clearly targeted by means of the education system in Tibet, where the government is expanding the residential school system to include preschool-aged students and enrolling a growing number of Tibetan students. Local options for schooling in Tibet have been systematically shuttered, 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.

Drawing on this witness testimony, this report sets out 18 recommendations. The first seek to call out the PRC government in various international fora for violations of the rights of Tibetans, support internationally-led investigations and sanction the PRC officials responsible for these violations. The Subcommittee also recommends that the Government of Canada take measures to protect activists and researchers from harassment and intimidation by welcoming Tibetan activists and their families as refugees to Canada, and protecting those already here with a foreign agent registry. Other recommendations include advocating for independent academic research in Tibet and supporting measures to preserve Tibetan language and culture.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of their deliberations committees may make recommendations which they include in their reports for the consideration of the House of Commons or the Government. Recommendations related to this study are listed below.

Recommendation 1

That the Government of Canada request that the People’s Republic of China provide information as to the whereabouts of the 11th Panchen Lama, in order to confirm his wellbeing, and furthermore, that the Government of Canada publicly recognize the 11th Panchen Lama as a victim of enforced disappearance and related human rights violations. 11

Recommendation 2

That the Government of Canada issue press releases on the birthday (25 April) and on the day of disappearance (17 May) of the 11th Panchen Lama, as a means of drawing attention to his situation and securing his release. 11

Recommendation 3

That the Government of Canada support initiatives that seek to resume the Sino-Tibetan dialogue, through the mutually beneficial Middle Way Approach. 12

Recommendation 4

That the Government of Canada utilize the *Special Economic Measures Act* to sanction the Chinese officials involved in the deployment of second-generation ethnic policies that are being used to repress Tibetans and other minority groups in the People’s Republic of China. 14

Recommendation 5

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada increase the number of places in the current global human rights defenders stream of its government-assisted refugees program to accommodate an increased number of applicants and their families. 16

Recommendation 6

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada create a new temporary resident stream that enables human rights defenders to seek immediate and non-permanent safe haven in Canada..... 16

Recommendation 7

That the Government of Canada implement a foreign influence transparency registry in Canada, enhance protections for human rights defenders, and immediately close all so-called “People’s Republic of China police stations” in Canada, to ensure the safety of the Tibetan diaspora..... 17

Recommendation 8

That the Government of Canada appoint a Special Coordinator for Tibet to act as a frontline contact for all individuals and groups facing state-backed harassment, intimidation, and interference in Canada. 17

Recommendation 9

That the Government of Canada establish a list of entities involved in human rights abuses in Tibet, such as ones supplying equipment and technology for the residential boarding school and preschool system, and companies involved in the mass illegal collection of Tibetan DNA samples in Tibet, and prohibit investment in and dealings with those entities, and consider sanctions on them. 20

Recommendation 10

That the Government of Canada rely on diplomatic avenues internationally, including through its Ambassador to the United Nations, to draw attention to violations of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* by the Government of the People’s Republic of China which are occurring in the context of the residential school system in Tibet. 23

Recommendation 11

That Global Affairs Canada continue to fund the Enhancement of the Education and Resilience of Tibetan Youth project in India and Nepal to support Tibetan language preservation outside of Tibet..... 24

Recommendation 12

That the Government of Canada fund projects related to Tibetan language education, such as support for Tibetan language learning libraries or training for Tibetan language teachers. 24

Recommendation 13

That Global Affairs Canada, through a funding program such as the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives, fund research projects dedicated to collecting and disseminating information about the state of human rights of Tibetans in Tibet, particularly with regard to any explicit efforts at assimilation by the Government of the People’s Republic of China. 25

Recommendation 14

That Global Affairs Canada prioritize funding projects that seek to conduct academic research to identify the impacts that resettlement and education policies in Tibet have had or might have on the vibrancy of Tibetan language and culture..... 25

Recommendation 15

That the Government of Canada issue a statement that echoes the concerns of the four United Nations special rapporteurs in their 11 November 2022 communication to the Government of the People’s Republic of China, calling for an end to the residential boarding school system in Tibet, and for private Tibetan schools to be permitted and ensuring that Mandarin is not the sole language of instruction..... 27

Recommendation 16

That the Government of Canada 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, including the provincial party secretary in Tibet, and the architects responsible for designing and implementing the residential boarding school system..... 27

Recommendation 17

That the Government of Canada 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. 28

Recommendation 18

That the Government of Canada continue to seek support from present and future members of the United Nations Human Rights Council to pass a motion to study the transnational repression of minorities in China. 28



THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION OF TIBETANS AND THE CHINESE RESIDENTIAL BOARDING SCHOOL AND PRESCHOOL SYSTEM

INTRODUCTION

On 11 November 2022, four United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council Special Rapporteurs issued a letter denouncing “a series of oppressive actions against Tibetan educational, religious and linguistic institutions” in the People’s Republic of China (PRC).¹ In their letter, the rapporteurs noted that rapidly increasing enrollment in state-operated residential schools and preschools was indicative that the PRC was unfolding “a large-scale program to assimilate Tibetans into majority Han culture.”²

In response to growing international concern regarding the impacts of the residential school system on human rights in Tibet,³ the House of Commons Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development (the Subcommittee) held a study on “the Chinese government’s residential boarding schools and preschools in the Tibetan autonomous region and all Tibetan autonomous prefectures and counties.”⁴ Over the course of two meetings held on 10 February 2023 and 21 April 2023, the Subcommittee heard from eight witnesses, including Tibetan rights activists, academics and human rights experts.

Witnesses described how the PRC is exerting increasing control in Tibet through policies of sinicization that target areas such as religion, the traditional Tibetan nomadic lifestyle and language. Testimony suggested that this is symptomatic of a larger PRC agenda that violates minority rights in Tibet and across the country. Language is being most clearly targeted through the education system in Tibet, where the government is expanding the residential school system to include preschool-aged students and enrolling a growing number of Tibetan students. Local options for schooling in Tibet have been

1 Mandates of the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteurs on minority issues, in the field of cultural rights, on the right to education and on freedom of religion or belief, [Communication to the State Councilor and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Government of China](#), 11 November 2022.

2 Ibid.

3 “Tibet” as used in this report refers to the Tibet Autonomous Region in the People’s Republic of China as well as all other Tibetan autonomous prefectures and counties.

4 House of Commons Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs (SDIR), [Minutes](#), 10 February 2023.



systematically shuttered, while the residential schools have simultaneously phased out Tibetan language instruction and Tibetan-produced curriculum materials in favour of those employing Han Chinese language and cultural resources and teachers. Drawing on this testimony, the Subcommittee makes 18 recommendations to the Government of Canada aimed at supporting the religious freedoms of Tibetans, protecting activists and others from harassment and persecution, and ending the harms being inflicted by the residential school system that include family separation and forced linguistic and cultural loss.

Canada is particularly well-positioned to lead on this issue, given its acknowledgment 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 Canadian government has been participating in processes of reconciliation with Indigenous communities for many years, in an effort to take greater responsibility for those harms.⁵ The PRC attempted to discredit Canada's position on human rights issues as a result of these historical abuses. 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?"⁶

Canada also has its own history of holding back linguistic minorities, notably in Ontario and Manitoba, through discriminatory education legislation.⁷ The deleterious outcome for French-speakers in those provinces is well-known now for Canadians, and provides insight into the potential ramifications of the current policies being enacted in Tibet.

This report opens with an overview of the general human rights situation of Tibetans in the PRC, highlighting the ways in which the government has historically targeted their religion and nomadism and how that persecution continues to this day. This situation is set within the context of a wider campaign of sinicization that is occurring and affecting other minority groups in the PRC, showing how this campaign has intensified under President Xi Jinping. This first section concludes with a brief discussion of issues related

5 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, 2015; as referred to in SDIR, *Evidence*, 21 April 2023 (Sherap Therchin, Executive Director, Canada Tibet Committee).

6 SDIR, *Evidence*, 21 April 2023 (Sherap Therchin Executive Director, Canada Tibet Committee); witness referenced comments that are also cited in Brennan MacDonald, "China hits back at Canada, calls for UN investigation into crimes against Indigenous people," *CBC News*, 22 June 2021.

7 Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, *More than 100 years after the passing of Regulation 17, the Government of Ontario apologizes to Franco-Ontarians*; Government of Ontario, *Ontario Apologizes for 1912 Law on French in Schools*, News release, 22 February 2016. Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, *The Thornton Act is passed, abolishing the bilingual school system in Manitoba*.

to extraterritorial persecution of activists who speak up for minority rights in the PRC. The second section focuses on human rights violations related directly to the residential school system in Tibet, with a particular emphasis on the ways in which language and cultural rights are being violated by the government’s policies and practices and the implications that they have for Tibetans in Tibet. The report concludes with a discussion of the ways in which the Government of the PRC uses propaganda and disinformation to create narratives about the residential school system in Tibet, and the importance of the role of the international community in calling this out and condemning the violations inherent in the system.

HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION OF TIBETANS

The Subcommittee was told that while Tibetans have faced “intense violence from the state”⁸ since the beginning of the occupation of Tibet by the PRC in 1951, “the Chinese government’s assault on Tibetans has [now] reached a breaking point.”⁹ According to Chemi Lhamo, a Tibetan-Canadian activist, the PRC is aiming to dismantle the “three foundational pillars” of Tibetan identity: its religion, its nomadic culture, and its language.¹⁰ Though language is being most clearly targeted through the residential school system, the PRC government uses other means to repress the religion and nomadism of Tibetans.

Tibetan Buddhism

Tibetan Buddhism, the religion of most Tibetans, is one of the “critical components of Tibetans’ identity,” according to Sophie Richardson, China Director at Human Rights Watch.¹¹ As such, it has been targeted by the PRC government in its larger “project of forced assimilation.”¹²

For example, Lhadon Tethong, Director of the Tibet Action Institute, told the Subcommittee that Tibetans have been “forbidden from engaging in really simple Buddhist practices with seemingly no political implications,” such as hanging prayer flags or building Tibetan Buddhist statues.¹³ The PRC has imposed “restrictions on the

8 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Lhadon Tethong, Director, Tibet Action Institute).

9 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Chemi Lhamo, As an individual).

10 Ibid.

11 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Sophie Richardson, Canada Director, Human Rights Watch).

12 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Chemi Lhamo).

13 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Lhadon Tethong).



monasteries and the process of recognizing” reincarnations and lineages.¹⁴ With the constant threat of active surveillance by the PRC under President Xi Jinping, Tibetans are effectively banned “from going into the monastery or observing really important Tibetan Buddhist traditions, holidays or occasions.”¹⁵

Tenzin Choekyi, a Senior Researcher at Tibet Watch, described monasteries as spiritual “learning centres”¹⁶ for Tibetans, emphasizing their cultural significance. However, she stated that in 2012, the government introduced “monastic management committees in monasteries where Chinese Communist Party members, who are atheist, are there permanently to monitor, oversee and supervise all of the activities of the monks.”¹⁷ Gyal Lo, an academic researcher and educational sociologist, reported how the monks and nuns are “being slowly strangled with rules and regulations” that both discourage new entrants as well as burden them with studying “Xi Jinping’s thoughts and the latest propaganda from Beijing,” leaving them with little time for their religious studies.¹⁸

Tenzin Rabgyal, the Abbot of Tashi Lhunpo Monastery, told the Subcommittee of the ongoing scandal surrounding the mysterious disappearance of the 11th Panchen Lama in 1995 at age five, after his detention by PRC authorities. He explained that for Tibetan Buddhists, the Panchen Lama serves as a “root guru,” likening his importance to that of the Dalai Lama through the analogy of “the sun being His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the moon being His Holiness the Panchen Lama.”¹⁹ Functionally, the figure of the Panchen Lama also plays an important role in actively preserving and advocating for a distinct Tibetan identity. For example, the 10th Panchen Lama “worked tirelessly for the spread of education, preservation of... Tibetan culture, and the education system.”²⁰ After the disappearance of the 11th Panchen Lama, the PRC appointed another Panchen Lama, whom Tenzin Rabgyal described as “a political tool [of] the Chinese government.”²¹

According to Tenzin Rabgyal, the Dalai Lama’s return to Tibet from exile is essential to resolving the Sino-Tibetan conflict through the “mutually beneficial Middle Way

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Tenzin Choekyi, Senior Researcher, Tibet Watch).

17 Ibid.

18 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Gyal Lo, Academic Researcher and Educational Sociologist, As an Individual).

19 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Tenzin Rabgyal, Abbot, Tashi Lhunpo Monastery).

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

Approach.”²² The “Middle Way Approach” is a peace solution advocated by the Dalai Lama that calls for meaningful autonomy for Tibet and Tibetans while they remain part of a unified PRC.²³ However, Lhadon Tethong noted that any efforts made towards this end are seriously hampered by the PRC government’s “transnational repression and punitive measures against corporations who might quote the Dalai Lama, our government, and speak out in favour of Tibet.”²⁴

Witnesses have stressed the importance of resolving the Sino-Tibetan conflict in order to address the human rights issues in Tibet. Sherap Therchin indicated that he was hopeful that the unanimous motion passed by the House of Commons on 14 December 2022²⁵ could help with resumption of dialogue between China and Tibet.²⁶ The motion supported Canada’s call “for dialogue between representatives of the Tibetan people ... and the government of the People’s Republic of China with a view to enabling Tibet to exercise genuine autonomy within the framework of the Chinese constitution” through the Middle Way Approach.²⁷

With all of this in mind, the Subcommittee recommends:

Recommendation 1

That the Government of Canada request that the People’s Republic of China provide information as to the whereabouts of the 11th Panchen Lama, in order to confirm his wellbeing, and furthermore, that the Government of Canada publicly recognize the 11th Panchen Lama as a victim of enforced disappearance and related human rights violations.

Recommendation 2

That the Government of Canada issue press releases on the birthday (25 April) and on the day of disappearance (17 May) of the 11th Panchen Lama, as a means of drawing attention to his situation and securing his release.

22 Ibid.

23 International Campaign for Tibet, “[The Middle Way](#).”

24 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Lhadon Tethong).

25 House of Commons, “Motions,” [Journals](#), 14 December 2022.

26 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Sherap Therchin, Executive Director, Canada Tibet Committee).

27 House of Commons, [Debates](#), 13 December 2022, 1005.



Recommendation 3

That the Government of Canada support initiatives that seek to resume the Sino-Tibetan dialogue, through the mutually beneficial Middle Way Approach.

Nomadism

The second pillar of Tibetan culture that is being targeted by the PRC's assimilation tactics is the traditional nomadic way of life. Gyal Lo stated that Tibetans' "ancestral knowledge" of the land makes them "compassionate stewards of one of the most fragile ecosystems on the planet."²⁸ However, government policies have frequently sought to displace nomads from their lands under the seemingly misguided pretext of "ecological protection," according to Sherap Therchin, Executive Director of the Canada Tibet Committee.²⁹ Tenzin Choekyi explained how the government's "extremely high-altitude ecological resettlement program" is moving entire villages hundreds of kilometres across the region.³⁰

The effects of these relocations have been wide-reaching in terms of the economic and cultural survival of the affected communities. Chemi Lhamo told the Subcommittee how, in the last decade, "millions of nomads have been relocated from the grasslands into reservation-style housing projects... with little to no access to jobs."³¹ Alongside a lack of access to the job market, Tenzin Choekyi pointed out that community relocations have also led to a loss of "traditional and sustainable livelihoods" where "[p]arents no longer have their homeland to live in and pass on their ancestral knowledge of the land."³²

Escalating Repression Under President Xi Jinping

Several witnesses noted that there has been a distinct escalation of repression in Tibet through the implementation of assimilationist policies in recent years. According to Gyal Lo, after President Xi Jinping "stabilized his second term, he dramatically increased this high nationalism combined with the domination of the Communist Party."³³ Lhadon

28 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Gyal Lo).

29 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Sherap Therchin).

30 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Tenzin Choekyi).

31 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Chemi Lhamo).

32 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Tenzin Choekyi).

33 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Gyal Lo).

Tethong described how under his presidency, there has been “a crackdown that people liken to the Cultural Revolution” in Tibet.³⁴

Sophie Richardson pointed to the arrest and arbitrary detention of Tibetan language activist Tashi Wangchuk in 2016 as an indicator that the “Chinese authorities were taking a harder line on the issue” of minority language rights.³⁵ Sherap Therchin explained to the Subcommittee that Wangchuk was formally charged in 2018, and “was sentenced to five years in prison just for advocating and speaking about the preservation and promotion of the Tibetan language to a *New York Times* reporter.”³⁶ Sophie Richardson noted that this is demonstrative of the PRC government’s shift towards a larger political campaign of repression.³⁷

Tenzin Dorjee, Senior Researcher and Strategic at the Tibet Action Institute, explained that the events of the last five years under President Xi Jinping should be understood as a shift towards an “eliminationist approach” to the Tibet question:

Whereas previous administrations ... balanced political repression with a degree of ethnic accommodation toward Tibetans, Xi Jinping’s China has opted for an all-out eliminationist approach. This new approach is grounded in the ultra-nationalist notion that the only route to political stability is cultural uniformity and ethnic homogeneity. ... What Beijing now seeks to eliminate is not just separatist ideology but the separate identity of Tibetans. Dissent never went unpunished under Beijing, but now even difference is criminalized.³⁸

According to Chemi Lhamo, this eliminationist approach “is being carried out in every space: in the monasteries, primary and nursery schools, on the grasslands and in towns, in neighbourhoods and in private homes.”³⁹

State Persecution of Ethnic Minorities and Tibet

Witnesses underlined that the declining human rights situation of Tibetans needs to be understood within the wider context of the persecution of ethnic minorities across all of the PRC. Although the human rights situation of Tibetans is unique from those of other ethnic minorities in the country, such as the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang Autonomous

34 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Lhadon Tethong).

35 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Sophie Richardson).

36 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Sherap Therchin).

37 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Sophie Richardson).

38 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Tenzin Dorjee, Senior Researcher and Strategist, Tibet Action Institute).

39 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Chemi Lhamo).



Region⁴⁰ or the Southern Mongolians,⁴¹ they are all subject to what Lhadon Tethong described as “second-generation ethnic policies.”⁴² She stated that these policies were all “developed at the highest levels of the Chinese Communist Party” under President Xi Jinping.⁴³ For example, according to Gyal Lo, the conditions reported in boarding preschools for Uyghurs in Xinjiang⁴⁴ are “exactly the same” as the ones he had observed in Tibet.⁴⁵ Lhadon Tethong mentioned that Southern Mongolians are also subjected to mandatory boarding schools.⁴⁶

Lhadon Tethong told the Subcommittee that “Tibetans, [Uyghurs] and Mongolians ... need to be looked at together,” and that “Beijing would love nothing more than for us to keep all of this in silos.”⁴⁷ She stated that combining support for all ethnic minorities in China would be more “powerful” and could help to push for “how Beijing could be addressed or made to answer” for its conduct towards minorities as a whole.⁴⁸

Therefore, recognizing the harms being done by government policies towards ethnic minorities in the PRC, the Subcommittee recommends:

Recommendation 4

That the Government of Canada utilize the *Special Economic Measures Act* to sanction the Chinese officials involved in the deployment of second-generation ethnic policies that are being used to repress Tibetans and other minority groups in the People’s Republic of China.

Silencing Dissent

However, while similarities can be drawn between Tibet and other ethnic minorities in the PRC, Lhadon Tethong explained that “[b]ecause of Tibet’s political claims to

40 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Gyal Lo).

41 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Lhadon Tethong).

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, [OHCHR Assessment of human rights concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People’s Republic of China](#), 31 August 2022.

45 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Gyal Lo).

46 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Lhadon Tethong).

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

independence and history, and the global support that Tibet has enjoyed, the Chinese government treats Tibet very differently in many ways” from other ethnic minorities inside the PRC.⁴⁹ Tenzin Choeyki described how “ever since the spate of 2008 freedom protests and the self-immolations from 2009, Tibet was effectively turned into a police state.”⁵⁰ Chemi Lhamo noted that this has resulted in Tibet being uniquely subject to a government policy of “lockdown by design since 2008.”⁵¹ She explained that, “[t]he Chinese Communist Party has basically severed our entire nation into two: those on the outside, who [are] denied visas; and those who are inside and who cannot leave because they don’t have passports.”⁵² Sophie Richardson noted that concerns regarding travel restrictions were raised by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in its 2018 Concluding Observations on China that found that the PRC government continued to deny passports to ethnic minorities, such as Tibetans.⁵³

Tibetan activists working to gather and disseminate information about ongoing human rights violations occurring in Tibet are putting their lives at risk and are subject to harassment and intimidation from PRC authorities.⁵⁴ Tenzin Dorjee explained that the PRC was “very effective and rather successful at mobilizing big data ... to silence Tibetans abroad in the world, and repress Tibetans inside Tibet.”⁵⁵ To this end, PRC government officials are “linking Tibetans living in the diaspora to their family members in Tibet,” and by doing so, “they use families who are in Tibet as hostages.”⁵⁶

Explaining how this is done, Tenzin Choeyki told the Subcommittee that:

Tibetans inside are warned to cut off their ties with friends and family living in exile and diasporas. Old-aged people with knowledge of family history are interviewed to extract information about Tibetans living outside. Huge cash awards are promised for reports on communication between those inside and outside. Police visit homes and warn aging

49 Ibid.

50 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Tenzin Choeyki).

51 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Chemi Lhamo).

52 Ibid.

53 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Sophie Richardson); cited document is the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, [Concluding observations on the combined fourteenth to seventeenth periodic reports of China \(including Hong Kong, China and Macao, China\)](#), 19 September 2018.

54 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Lhadon Tethong); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 1330, 10 February 2023 (Chemi Lhamo).

55 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Tenzin Dorjee).

56 Ibid.



parents to tell the children in exile to stop going to protests calling for freedom in Tibet.⁵⁷

Sherap Therchin told the Subcommittee that as a consequence, Tibetan human rights defenders and their family members should be considered for refugee status by Canada and other countries.⁵⁸

As such, the Subcommittee recommends:

Recommendation 5

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada increase the number of places in the current global human rights defenders stream of its government-assisted refugees program to accommodate an increased number of applicants and their families.

Recommendation 6

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada create a new temporary resident stream that enables human rights defenders to seek immediate and non-permanent safe haven in Canada.

Furthermore, the Subcommittee was told that even activists residing in Canada experience foreign interference from the PRC authorities. Over the last two years, Sherap Therchin said that he personally felt an increasing sense of insecurity as a result of greater news coverage of “Chinese influence and interference in Canada, and especially after hearing the stories of the existence of Chinese police stations in Canada.”⁵⁹ Chemi Lhamo stated that “intimidation tactics are just all over, and with the police stations we are scared to navigate our own communities,” explaining that “spies are integrated within our communities.”⁶⁰ Sophie Richardson indicated that Human Rights Watch had looked into “Chinese government threats to academic freedom” in countries like Canada, and concluded that more steps need to be taken to protect “the freedom that students and scholars of and from China have to participate in university life and in debates and research, free of interference.”⁶¹

57 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Tenzin Choekyi).

58 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Sherap Therchin).

59 Ibid.

60 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Chemi Lhamo).

61 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Sophie Richardson).

Sophie Richardson highlighted that there are currently no mechanisms in place “for reporting or for effective push-back”⁶² against Chinese interference. Chemi Lhamo affirmed this, telling the Subcommittee that after receiving “thousands of death threats and rape threats” because of her activism, she spoke with the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and “any type of security, you name it.”⁶³ However, she said that she still has “no good advice” to give to others facing the same situation.⁶⁴ She was clear that she believes that both a foreign agent registry and a designated person appointed to deal with cases of foreign interference⁶⁵ would help to protect activists and academics in Canada.

As such, the Subcommittee recommends:

Recommendation 7

That the Government of Canada implement a foreign influence transparency registry in Canada, enhance protections for human rights defenders, and immediately close all so-called “People’s Republic of China police stations” in Canada, to ensure the safety of the Tibetan diaspora.

Recommendation 8

That the Government of Canada appoint a Special Coordinator for Tibet to act as a frontline contact for all individuals and groups facing state-backed harassment, intimidation, and interference in Canada.

THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SYSTEM IN TIBET

Narrowing Options for Education in Tibet

The demonstrated shift by the PRC under the direction of President Xi Jinping towards what one witness described as a “broad and aggressive assimilationist campaign of sinicization” has targeted the education system in a significant way.⁶⁶ Sophie Richardson described how this is occurring despite the PRC’s constitution that provides protections

62 Ibid.

63 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Chemi Lhamo).

64 Ibid.

65 As highlighted in Canadian coalition on human rights in China and Amnesty International Canada, [Canadian Coalition on Human Rights in China Report Update](#), March 2020, p. 51.

66 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Sophie Richardson).



for ethnic minorities and guarantees minority-language rights.⁶⁷ In fact, Article 37 of the *Law of the People's Republic of China on Regional National Autonomy* states that “[s]chools where most of the students come from minority nationalities should, whenever possible, use textbooks in their own languages and use these languages as the media of instruction.”⁶⁸

Residential schools across China were historically quite common, until a backlash against “school consolidation policies” prompted the State Council of the PRC to rule in 2012 “that all levels of school should be, in principle, non-residential, especially for young children in grades 1 to 3.”⁶⁹ However, three years later, the State Council decreed that, “in so-called minority areas, officials must strengthen boarding school construction and achieve the goal that students of all ethnic minorities will study in a school, live in a school and grow up in a school.”⁷⁰

This strengthening of the boarding school system in Tibet has resulted in its encompassing increasing numbers of Tibetan children. Gyal Lo told the Subcommittee that while boarding schools in Tibet have been operating since 1979, it is only since President Xi Jinping came to power that they were opened for preschool-aged students.⁷¹ He emphasized that this was done in combination with new legislation dictating mandatory schooling from the age of four.

Tenzin Dorjee told the Subcommittee how the Government of the PRC responded to recent international criticism of the residential school system in Tibet by explaining that the schools are needed because no local schooling alternatives are available for rural Tibetan children.⁷² However, he and other witnesses said that the Government of the PRC has spent the past several years forcibly closing local schools as well as private schools across Tibet.⁷³ Tenzin Choekyi cited two examples of this happening in 2021.

67 Ibid.

68 People's Republic of China, “Article 37,” *Law of the People's Republic of China on Regional National Autonomy*, 31 May 1984.

69 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Lhadon Tethong). Links to the State Council decisions in Chinese are included in a [brief](#) submitted by the Tibet Action institute to SDIR.

70 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Lhadon Tethong).

71 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Gyal Lo).

72 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Tenzin Dorjee). For a description of the statement made by Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning, please see *Xinhua Net*, “[Western media should respect facts when reporting boarding schools in China: FM](#),” 9 March 2023.

73 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Tenzin Dorjee); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Gyal Lo); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Lhadon Tethong).

One private school closed “without any official clarification,” while another “was ordered to change the curriculum and medium of instruction in Chinese and take all exams in Chinese, or face a shut down.”⁷⁴ This situation has indeed left Tibetan parents, in most cases, with “no local options” for schools.⁷⁵

At the same time, the educational materials being used at the local level in Tibet began to change considerably. For example, the textbooks with Tibetan language and cultural content that Gyal Lo was involved in helping to create suddenly stopped being produced by the PRC government.⁷⁶ Sophie Richardson noted that Human Rights Watch had found that the Government of the PRC had ensured that teachers had ready access to Chinese-medium resources, which became those most used “since Tibetan-medium materials simply weren’t available to people.”⁷⁷

The Residential School System and its Effects on Family and Community Life in Tibet

Witnesses from the Tibet Action Institute referred to their 2021 research report on residential schools to describe high-level details of the system.⁷⁸ There are an estimated 800,000 Tibetan children who are currently attending a residential school, accounting for 78% of all Tibetan children aged six to 18.⁷⁹ Gyal Lo told the Subcommittee that he estimates that a further 100,000 children aged four to six attend one of more than 50 boarding preschools.⁸⁰

Built into the model of residential schooling is the separation between children and their parents and wider communities. Lhadon Tethong emphasized that this separation is taking place against the will of parents and children—parents have “no choice but to send their children to live in these schools, because the authorities have closed the local village schools” and the children “are forced to go to boarding schools. In some cases, the children cry for days... Both the children and the parents are unwilling.”⁸¹ Very young

74 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Tenzin Choekyi).

75 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Gyal Lo).

76 Ibid.

77 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Sophie Richardson).

78 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Tenzin Dorjee); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Lhadon Tethong).

79 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Lhadon Tethong); the statistics are cited in a [brief](#) submitted by the Tibet Action Institute to SDIR.

80 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Gyal Lo).

81 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Lhadon Tethong).



children attending the preschools can spend weekends with their families, but Gyal Lo reported that older children attending a residential school see their parents and families about every three months.⁸²

Lhadon Tethong argued that family separation is an intentional policy of the PRC government “to isolate children from their families so as to erase their Tibetan identities and replace it with a Chinese identity.”⁸³ This isolation is leading to what the team of UN special rapporteurs described as “deep and serious negative psychological and social impacts” as a result of the loss of family connections and feelings of loneliness, among other things.⁸⁴ Parents living in rural areas sometimes resist this separation to the degree possible by moving to urban areas where there are day schools.⁸⁵ However, this is compounding the potential for negative effects by causing further disruptions to traditional nomadic ways of life.⁸⁶

The harm that the schools are causing to Tibetan children, families and communities must be condemned by every possible means. As such, the Subcommittee recommends:

Recommendation 9

That the Government of Canada establish a list of entities involved in human rights abuses in Tibet, such as ones supplying equipment and technology for the residential boarding school and preschool system, and companies involved in the mass illegal collection of Tibetan DNA samples in Tibet, and prohibit investment in and dealings with those entities, and consider sanctions on them.

Minority Language and Culture Rights in the School System

Of all the aspects of the school system, the replacement of the Tibetan language and cultural practices with Chinese language and culture is what the majority of witnesses objected to most strongly. The severity and extent to which language and culture have been targeted in the Tibetan residential schools by PRC government policies led Lhadon Tethong to denounce the schools as “the cornerstone of a broader effort to wipe

82 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Gyal Lo).

83 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Lhadon Tethong).

84 Mandates of the UN Special Rapporteurs on minority issues, in the field of cultural rights, on the right to education and on freedom of religion or belief, [Communication to the State Councilor and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Government of China](#), 11 November 2022.

85 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Lhadon Tethong).

86 Ibid.

out the current and future resistance of our fiercely proud Tibetan people by eliminating our language, our religion and our way of life.”⁸⁷ Of these markers of identity, language is particularly being targeted, since according to Tenzin Dorjee, “[a]mong all the features of Tibetan identity, language is what most effectively unites Tibetans across the plateau...Of all the markers of a distinct identity, language is the central pride of the Tibetan people.”⁸⁸

In the same way that the residential school system itself has been expanded by reducing the availability of alternatives, several witnesses discussed how Tibetan has been phased out of schools by reducing its availability in indirect ways. For example, Sophie Richardson told the Subcommittee that Chinese authorities hired thousands of non-Tibetan teachers to teach in Tibet.⁸⁹ Consequently, Tibetan children are being taught “by mostly Chinese teachers, or increasingly more and more Chinese teachers.”⁹⁰ Tenzin Choekyi told the story of meeting a teenage Tibetan refugee in India who said that at her residential school, only 10 out of 50 teachers were Tibetan and able to teach in Tibetan.⁹¹

Tenzin Dorjee emphasized the dire consequences of this shift away from Tibetan as the medium of instruction for Tibetan students. Citing Gyal Lo’s research, he stated that preschool boarding school students lose their ability to speak in Tibetan after three to six months at a school where Chinese is the predominant language.⁹² Gyal Lo also shared his own experience of observing his young grandnieces coming home on the weekend from their boarding preschool that they had been attending for three months and conversing with one another only in Chinese.⁹³ Given the speed of this shift, Tenzin Dorjee warned that in the span of one generation, “the majority of the Tibetan population will be speaking to each other in Chinese, not in Tibetan. There is nothing wrong with being bilingual, but there is something disturbing when Tibetans talk to each other in Chinese as their main language.”⁹⁴

87 Ibid.

88 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Tenzin Dorjee).

89 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Sophie Richardson).

90 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Lhadon Tethong).

91 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Tenzin Choekyi).

92 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Tenzin Dorjee).

93 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Gyal Lo).

94 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Tenzin Dorjee).



These Tibetan children, when they lose their ability to speak fluently in Tibetan, become unable to communicate with their grandparents, who do not speak Chinese.⁹⁵ The residential school system thus not only removes children from their families in a very physical way, but also removes them from their family culturally, by “pulling Tibetan children out by their roots from [their] culture and their families...by teaching almost entirely in Mandarin, the Chinese language.”⁹⁶ Tenzin Dorjee described this situation in stark terms:

Tibetan children below a certain age are fast becoming native Mandarin speakers, which means they can no longer converse meaningfully with their parents and not even communicate with their grandparents...[i]f children inherit genes from their parents, it can be said they inherit culture from their grandparents.⁹⁷

Alongside instruction in Chinese, children attending the schools are also subject to “intense political indoctrination” and are “cut off from authentic Tibetan culture—beyond, of course, what the Chinese Communist Party approves of and what you’ll see in the propaganda.”⁹⁸ Gyal Lo described to the Subcommittee how the curriculum and materials used in schools are designed to “shift the children’s entire psychological foundation from Tibetan to Chinese.”⁹⁹ For example, he stated that Tibetan history is no longer being taught, and that children are “required to sing the Chinese national song when they enter the school.”¹⁰⁰ The children are put through “a highly politicized curriculum designed to sever their ties to their religion and culture,”¹⁰¹ with Lhadon Tethong adding that Tibetan children are outright forbidden from practising their religion while at school.¹⁰²

Several witnesses underscored that these practices violate several international instruments, including the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (not ratified by the PRC) and the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (ratified by the PRC in 1992).¹⁰³ Sherap Therchin condemned the school system as specifically violating the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, ratified by the PRC

95 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Sherap Therchin).

96 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Gyal Lo).

97 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Tenzin Dorjee).

98 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Lhadon Tethong).

99 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Gyal Lo).

100 Ibid.

101 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Tenzin Dorjee).

102 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Lhadon Tethong).

103 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Sherap Therchin); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Sophie Richardson).

in 2001, which states that “all peoples have the right of self-determination.”¹⁰⁴ Sophie Richardson pointed out that additionally, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child raised concerns as long ago as 2013 regarding how minority languages are taught and used and the measures in place to ensure participation from ethnic minorities in the PRC, including Tibetans and Uyghurs.¹⁰⁵ She also noted that in March 2023, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights expressed concern “about reports of the large-scale campaign to eradicate Tibetan culture and language, as well as the general undermining of the linguistic identity of ethnic minorities through the assimilation policy of the State party, known as sinicization, including the coerced residential (boarding) school system imposed on Tibetan children.”¹⁰⁶

Recognizing the importance of calling attention to breaches of the international order and international agreements, the Subcommittee recommends:

Recommendation 10

That the Government of Canada rely on diplomatic avenues internationally, including through its Ambassador to the United Nations, to draw attention to violations of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* by the Government of the People’s Republic of China which are occurring in the context of the residential school system in Tibet.

Several witnesses emphasized the role that the diaspora and international community can and need to play in preventing the total loss of the Tibetan language and culture. Chemi Lhamo, a member of the diaspora in Toronto, told the Subcommittee how the large Tibetan community there gathers regularly to “celebrate our culture, learn our language, study our scriptures and pass on our rich heritage,” allowing Tibetan life to continue to flourish outside of Tibet.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, Sherap Therchin underscored the value of a Global Affairs Canada language preservation grant to support the large diaspora communities in India and Nepal. As a result, 76 schools were able to offer Tibetan-language instruction to

104 SDIR, *Evidence*, 21 April 2023 (Sherap Therchin); quoted excerpt from “[Article 1](#),” *United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, 16 December 1966.

105 SDIR, *Evidence*, 10 February 2023 (Sophie Richardson); see United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, “[List of issues in relation to the combined third and fourth periodic reports of China \(CRC/C/CHN/3-4\)](#),” Sixty-fourth session, 16 September–4 October 2013.

106 United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, “Cultural and linguistic identity and expression in education,” [Concluding observations on the third periodic report of China, including Hong Kong, China and Macao, China](#), 22 March 2023.

107 SDIR, *Evidence*, 10 February 2023 (Chemi Lhamo).



Tibetan refugee communities.¹⁰⁸ He commented that “the project provided valuable lessons about challenges faced when promoting Tibetan language in the face of a different dominant language,” and encouraged its continuance.¹⁰⁹ Sophie Richardson also called for increased support for these types of activities that strive to preserve the Tibetan language and culture outside of Tibet.¹¹⁰

Therefore, the Subcommittee recommends:

Recommendation 11

That Global Affairs Canada continue to fund the Enhancement of the Education and Resilience of Tibetan Youth project in India and Nepal to support Tibetan language preservation outside of Tibet.

Recommendation 12

That the Government of Canada fund projects related to Tibetan language education, such as support for Tibetan language learning libraries or training for Tibetan language teachers.

Information Sharing, State Propaganda and the School System

Most witnesses cited the closure of Tibet’s borders to outsiders as a major barrier in being able to gain a full picture of the residential school system.¹¹¹ Tenzin Dorjee described the process of trying to conduct research on the residential school system in Tibet to the Subcommittee, saying:

[I]t’s very difficult to do, because the Chinese government does not allow any foreigner, any foreign researcher, scholar, independent investigator or journalist to go into Tibet. They don’t allow any information from Tibet to escape out of Tibet.¹¹²

108 For information regarding this funding and the program, please see: Central Tibetan Administration, [“Canadian Government announces 5.4 million in funding for Tibetan Education,”](#) 20 November 2018.

109 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Sherap Therchin).

110 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Sophie Richardson).

111 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Chemi Lhamo); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Tenzin Dorjee); SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Sherap Therchin).

112 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Tenzin Dorjee).

Under these conditions, knowing the details of the situation in Tibet is very difficult. Therefore, in support of researchers and the importance of their work in the context of human rights, the Subcommittee recommends:

Recommendation 13

That Global Affairs Canada, through a funding program such as the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives, fund research projects dedicated to collecting and disseminating information about the state of human rights of Tibetans in Tibet, particularly with regard to any explicit efforts at assimilation by the Government of the People’s Republic of China.

Recommendation 14

That Global Affairs Canada prioritize funding projects that seek to conduct academic research to identify the impacts that resettlement and education policies in Tibet have had or might have on the vibrancy of Tibetan language and culture.

Those who have managed to investigate the residential school system in Tibet and sound the alarm regarding the human rights concerns associated with it have not gone unignored by the Chinese authorities. Sophie Richardson told the Subcommittee that Human Rights Watch has been sanctioned and that “the Chinese government now reflexively rejects anything that we publish as hopelessly biased and fictional.”¹¹³ Chemi Lhamo made clear to the Subcommittee the likelihood that Gyal Lo would receive threats on account of his testimony regarding the schools, drawing from her own experience of harassment as a result of speaking publicly about Tibetan rights issues.¹¹⁴ These consequences for those who do investigate and report on the residential school system further obscure the international community’s ability to know the facts about them.

Alongside these issues are those related to the public information that the Government of the PRC promotes regarding the schools. Lhadon Tethong termed this information “slick propaganda,” stating that it emphasizes the impressive trappings of the school, such as that “the facilities can be quite beautiful and new and modern. The food can be fantastic.” However, she maintained that at the same time, “[a]ll of those things are true, and it’s still wrong what they’re doing.”¹¹⁵

113 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Sophie Richardson).

114 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Chemi Lhamo).

115 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Lhadon Tethong).



As well as pointing to the high quality of conditions at the schools, Sophie Richardson explained that “[t]he Chinese government generally continues to insist that it is merely making education maximally available to the largest number of children, and that this is all to the public good.”¹¹⁶ She added that it typically responds to the human rights concerns flagged by various UN human rights bodies by stating “the number of children in the aggregate who are being educated, without answering the question about access to mother-tongue education or the denial of that right.”¹¹⁷ All of these public comments are carefully constructed to rely on positive themes in global education, such as “modernization” and “universal pre-K education,” but, as Lhadon Tethong asserted, the true intent of the residential schools is to revoke the right to receive education in Tibetan, as can be seen “in their [the PRC government’s] policy documents and decrees.”¹¹⁸

Witnesses also condemned as disingenuous the PRC government’s frequent employment of the term “bilingual education” with reference to the residential school system. Tenzin Dorjee flatly rejected this characterization as further propaganda, telling the Subcommittee that, in fact, “there is nothing bilingual about the system.”¹¹⁹ Sophie Richardson directed the Subcommittee’s attention to a 2020 Human Rights Watch report on the issue that revealed that schools in Tibet had increasingly adopted Chinese as the language of instruction due to a lack of Tibetan teachers and materials, and that consequently, “claims that they were providing so-called bilingual education to Tibetan children were, quite simply, a lie.”¹²⁰ Sherap Therchin told the Subcommittee that the policy has actually “reduced the ability of Tibetan children to access schooling in their own language.”¹²¹

Within the last year, the international community has begun to take action to condemn the violations occurring in the school system and to call for change. The letter sent by four UN special rapporteurs to the Government of the PRC on 11 November 2022 that expressed serious concerns with the residential school system in Tibet was later made public in a statement issued by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in February 2023.¹²² In November 2022, the Chairs of the United States

116 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Sophie Richardson).

117 Ibid.

118 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Lhadon Tethong).

119 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Tenzin Dorjee).

120 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 10 February 2023 (Sophie Richardson); also see, Human Rights Watch, [China’s ‘Bilingual Education’ Policy in Tibet: Tibetan-Medium Schooling Under Threat](#), 4 March 2020.

121 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Sherap Therchin).

122 UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, [“China: UN experts alarmed by separation of 1 million Tibetan children from families and forced assimilation at residential schools,”](#) 6 February 2023.

Congressional-Executive Commission on China released a letter sent to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights that exposed, condemned and called for change regarding the residential school system.¹²³ In April 2023, a representative of Germany's federal Foreign Office expressed concern about the residential school system and called for the PRC government to close the schools.¹²⁴

The Subcommittee notes that Canada's House of Commons, in December 2022, voted unanimously in favour of a motion calling for a resumption of the Sino-Tibetan dialogue "with a view to enabling Tibet to exercise genuine autonomy within the framework of the Chinese constitution."¹²⁵

Thus, given the seriousness and potential extent of the particular impacts of the residential school system on Tibetan life, the Subcommittee recommends:

Recommendation 15

That the Government of Canada issue a statement that echoes the concerns of the four United Nations special rapporteurs in their 11 November 2022 communication to the Government of the People's Republic of China, calling for an end to the residential boarding school system in Tibet, and for private Tibetan schools to be permitted and ensuring that Mandarin is not the sole language of instruction.

Recommendation 16

That the Government of Canada 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, including the provincial party secretary in Tibet, and the architects responsible for designing and implementing the residential boarding school system.

Tenzin Dorjee made clear to the Subcommittee that "Beijing actually cares a lot" about how its actions are portrayed on the international scene, and that "it is possible for the

123 Senator Jeff Merkley and Jim McGovern, United States Congressional-Executive Commission on China, [letter](#) to Volker Turk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 30 November 2022, submitted in a brief to SDIR by Chemi Lhamo.

124 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Tenzin Dorjee). The statement can be found at Deutscher Bundestag, Human Rights Committee, [Government: Close forced boarding schools for Tibetan children](#), [TRANSLATION], News release, 19 April 2023.

125 House of Commons, "Motions," [Journals](#), 14 December 2022.



[PRC] to budge and to change its behaviour [and its] policy” under pressure.¹²⁶ Therefore, the international efforts that have been made thus far to expose and condemn the Government of the PRC for the human rights abuses perpetuated by the residential school system in Tibet must be supported and strengthened by a concerted diplomatic initiative.

As such, the Subcommittee recommends:

Recommendation 17

That the Government of Canada 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.

Recommendation 18

That the Government of Canada continue to seek support from present and future members of the United Nations Human Rights Council to pass a motion to study the transnational repression of minorities in China.

CONCLUSION

In recognizing the importance of safeguarding the vibrant culture and language of the Tibetan people, the Subcommittee stands with the international community and reiterates its commitment to, in the words of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “embrace diversity through the promotion and implementation of international human rights standards.”¹²⁷ As underlined by Tenzin Dorjee, language is foundational to a people’s “way of being in the world.”¹²⁸ By carrying out assimilationist policies that deprive minority groups of their ancestral culture, suppress their language and separate children from their communities, the PRC is causing traumatic loss at both the individual and national level.¹²⁹ Witnesses were clear that the PRC government has only increased its commitment to sinicizing Tibet and Tibetans in recent years through the expansion of the residential school system, and that consequently, the time to act is now.

126 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Tenzin Dorjee).

127 [United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, OHCHR and minorities.](#)

128 SDIR, [Evidence](#), 21 April 2023 (Tenzin Dorjee).

129 Ibid.

In response, the Subcommittee has made recommendations to the Government of Canada based on the priorities identified by witnesses: to call out the PRC government for its repression of minorities and particularly for its human rights violations in Tibet, to support Tibetan and international initiatives to investigate human rights violations, to protect those who speak up on behalf of the rights of Tibetans and other minorities in the PRC, and to sponsor projects seeking to preserve Tibetan culture and language.

Though the world is only just beginning to hear of the human rights violations associated with the residential school system in Tibet, Tibetan families and children are only too aware of its implications for their survival as a distinct people. Canada has a responsibility to respond to the urgency of their needs and can play a leading role internationally in helping to end this system.

APPENDIX A LIST OF WITNESSES

The following table lists the witnesses who appeared before the committee at its meetings related to this report. Transcripts of all public meetings related to this report are available on the committee’s [webpage for this study](#).

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
As an individual	2023/02/10	24
Chemi Lhamo, Community Organizer and Human Rights Activist		
Gyal Lo, Academic Researcher and Educational Sociologist		
Human Rights Watch	2023/02/10	24
Sophie Richardson, China Director		
Tibet Action Institute	2023/02/10	24
Lhadon Tethong, Director		
As an individual	2023/04/21	28
Chemi Lhamo, Community Organizer and Human Rights Activist		
Canada Tibet Committee	2023/04/21	28
Sherap Therchin, Executive Director		
Tashi Lhunpo Monastery	2023/04/21	28
Tenzin Thupten Rabgyal, Abbot		
Tibet Action Institute	2023/04/21	28
Tenzin Dorjee, Senior Researcher and Strategist		
Tibet Watch	2023/04/21	28
Tenzin Choekyi, Senior Researcher		

APPENDIX B LIST OF BRIEFS

The following is an alphabetical list of organizations and individuals who submitted briefs to the committee related to this report. For more information, please consult the committee's [webpage for this study](#).

Tibet Action Institute

REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

A copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development ([Meeting No. 71](#)) is tabled and a copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights ([Meetings Nos. 24, 28 and 31](#)).

Respectfully submitted,

Ali Ehsassi
Chair

