



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Biden cabinet members urged on Tibet DNA collection, family separation

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October 26, 2023

The chairs of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China have written to three Biden administration cabinet members urging action, including possible Global Magnitsky sanctions, on mass biometric data collection and family separation in Tibet.

In their letter to Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo, Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen and Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Rep. Chris Smith, R-NJ, and Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Wash., ask the three officials to impose export controls on technology used by China's Public Security Bureaus and other entities in Tibet to collect biometric data for political identification and racial profiling.

"Since each of you plays a role on the End-User Review Committee, we ask that you add [Tibet Autonomous Region] Public Security Bureaus and any other entities affiliated with the mass DNA collection project on the Bureau of Industry and Security's Entity List," says the letter from Smith and Merkley, chair and co-chair of the Commission. "This will ensure that U.S. companies are not contributing to, and are not directly or indirectly complicit in, the collecting and building of biometric ID surveillance capabilities in the TAR or other Tibetan areas."

The letter adds that action taken by the secretaries could include "Global Magnitsky sanctions or visa restrictions for officials in Tibetan areas for their complicity in mass biometric data collection and the forced separation of Tibetan children from their parents."

"The CECC chairs have given a strong call to action for holding Chinese officials accountable for their mass DNA collection in Tibet and unconscionable separation of Tibetan children from their families," International Campaign for Tibet President Tencho Gyatso said. *"We urge Secretaries Raimondo, Yellen and Blinken to heed the chairs' message and take these steps to limit US business complicity in China's abuses and to stand up for the rights of the Tibetan people."*

Mass DNA collection

The letter states that, "Through congressional hearings and our own investigations, it is clear that mass collection of DNA and other biometric data has been occurring in Tibet for at least the past six years."

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 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.

Earlier this year, [Blinken said he was “concerned by reports of the spread of mass DNA collection to Tibet](#) as an additional form of control and surveillance over the Tibetan population.”

The letter from the CECC chairs states that “Tibetans have no control over how their [blood] samples were collected, stored and used, nor do they know of the potential implications of DNA collection for them and for their extended families.

“The response to these circumstances should be robust,” the letter adds.

US companies

The letter notes that [Massachusetts-based Thermo Fisher Scientific](#) sold DNA kits and replacement parts for its DNA sequencers to police in the TAR.

“It is impossible for Thermo Fisher to claim with confidence that its products were being used simply for ‘police casework,’” the letter says. “And given there are so few safeguards for how DNA and other sensitive biometric data is gathered and used in the People’s Republic of China (PRC), it is our concern that biometric collection and analysis equipment could enable gross violations of human rights—from coercive mass surveillance to the harvesting of organs.”

The letter adds that the secretaries should “work with Congress to ensure that export controls are sufficient to stop future export of technology driving the PRC’s deployment and management of biometric ID surveillance.”

Forced separation of Tibetan children

China has [brutally occupied Tibet for over 60 years](#), turning it into the [least-free country on Earth](#) alongside South Sudan and Syria, according to watchdog group Freedom House.

In one of the most heinous recent examples of China’s human rights abuses, the Chinese government has separated over 1 million Tibetan children from their families in government-run boarding schools where they are cut off from their religion, language and culture.

In August, Blinken [announced visa restrictions on Chinese officials](#) for their involvement in the boarding schools program, saying China’s “coercive policies seek to eliminate Tibet’s distinct linguistic, cultural, and religious traditions among younger generations of Tibetans.”

In their letter, the CECC chairs suggest possible Global Magnitsky sanctions on Chinese officials responsible for separating the children from their families and for other abuses of the Tibetan people.

“The list of officials who should be sanctioned is likely very long, as the Tibetan people have been subject to successive, and sometimes brutal, campaigns of repression and social control over the decades,” the letter says. “But we ask the Administration to take a clear stance, that those who egregiously abuse the internationally-recognized rights of Tibetans should not profit from access to the United States or its financial system.”



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