



## INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

### 2023 in review: Resisting efforts to erase Tibet

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December 27, 2023

As China tried to wipe the name Tibet off the map in 2023, Tibetans and their allies kept up relentless efforts to protect Tibetan culture while advancing new ways to bring the Tibet-China conflict to a resolution.

More than six decades since its occupation of Tibet began, China in 2023 made a push to replace the internationally recognized name “Tibet” with the Chinese-language word “Xizang.”

China also tried to systematically cut Tibetan culture off at the roots, [forcing over 1 million Tibetan students into state-run boarding schools](#) that separate them from their families, language and traditions.

The year that marked the [10th anniversary of Xi Jinping taking over as China’s president](#) saw his campaign of “Sinification”—an effort to eliminate Tibetans’ unique identity and force them to assimilate—reach new levels of intensity.

But at the same time, Tibetans resisted, overcoming government orders to avoid religious teachings and protesting China’s denial of justice.

Outside Tibet, Tibetan exiles raised the pressure on the Chinese government around the world, including pushing forward key legislation in the United States to help peacefully resolve the Tibet-China conflict.

*“The year 2023 proved that Tibetans and their allies are steadfast in their commitment to their just cause and to the Middle Way policy of pursuing a negotiated solution with China to bring this conflict to a peaceful end,”* said Tencho Gyatso, who became president of the International Campaign for Tibet this year. *“What we need in 2024 is the international community to keep pushing China to get back to the negotiating table, and China to realize that its best chance for long-term stability in Tibet is to work with the Dalai Lama and Tibetans’ elected leaders.”*

### Oppression in Tibet in 2023

In 2023, the watchdog group Freedom House once again [rated Tibet the least-free country on Earth](#) in a tie with South Sudan and Syria. It was the third year in a row Tibet placed at the bottom of Freedom House’s rankings with an overall global freedom score of 1 out of 100.

While the rankings reflected the [events of 2022](#), the situation in Tibet continued to raise alarms in 2023.

Some of the most disturbing reports to emerge from Tibet this year were of the state-run boarding school system where over 1 million Tibetan children have been separated from their families and culture and forced to learn in the Chinese language with a curriculum geared toward Chinese subjects.

The boarding school system is part of China's campaign to "Sinify" Tibet—meaning to make it Chinese. That campaign reached new heights this year as the Chinese government began deliberate efforts [to replace the internationally recognized term "Tibet" with the Chinese-term "Xizang."](#)

China's State Council's 19th white paper on Tibet, released in November, replaced the term "Tibet" in its title, "CPC Policies on the Governance of Xizang in the New Era: Approach and Achievements." The paper [presented an overwhelmingly flowery image of Chinese rule in Tibet](#) with a barrage of achievements since 2012 while remaining silent on core projects of the Communist Party-state in Tibet, including the boarding schools and China's mass relocation programs.

## **Tibetan resistance**

Despite China's systematic attempts to wipe out Tibet's unique cultural and linguistic identity, the Tibetan people themselves remained resilient and their perseverance remained strong and indomitable.

In September, the government of Dzoghe Mema (Chinese: Zuogaimanma) Town in Tsoe (Hezuo) city, Gansu, ordered thousands of out-of-town Tibetan Buddhist devotees, who had gathered to receive a "Kalachakra" religious teaching, to [leave the town](#). However, video evidence showed that [thousands of people gathered despite the government order](#) and stayed there to receive teachings from a revered teacher.

That was just one of many courageous acts of resistance by Tibetans inside Tibet in 2023.

Gonpo Kyi, sister of an unjustly imprisoned Tibetan businessman, protested peacefully and repeatedly for her brother's freedom outside the Tibet Autonomous Region Higher People's Court in the Tibetan capital of Lhasa. Over the course of the year, police detained, beat and forcibly removed her, even covering her with a banner to block her demonstration from public view. However, Gonpo Kyi has continued to resist peacefully, [and she was detained most recently on Dec. 13](#).

Tibetan language rights advocate Tashi Wangchuk has also continued to protest, despite previously serving a five-year prison sentence for appearing in a New York Times article and a documentary about China's attempts to restrict the Tibetan language. In August, Tashi said on social media that a [group of masked men attacked him](#) in a hotel room. Although he lodged a complaint, the police did not take adequate action, nor did the local hospital when he asked for a CT scan to investigate injuries to his head.

## **Resolve Tibet Act**

While the situation in Tibet remained oppressive for Tibetans, the situation in the outside world offered new impetus for a peaceful end to China's occupation.

In February, during a visit to Washington by the Tibetan sikyong (president), Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass., Rep. Michael McCaul, R-Texas, Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., and Sen. Todd Young, R-Ind.,

announced the [reintroduction of the Resolve Tibet Act](#). The bipartisan, bicameral legislation, whose full name is the Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Dispute Act, aims to pressure the Chinese government to get back to the negotiating table with Tibetan leaders for the first time since 2010.

In March, [Richard Gere, chairman of the International Campaign for Tibet, traveled to Washington](#) for a press conference with the bill's four main sponsors.

After dedicated advocacy by Tibetan Americans and Tibet supporters, the House Foreign Affairs Committee [unanimously approved the Resolve Tibet Act](#) at a markup hearing in late November. As a result, the bill can now move to the House floor.

McCaul, the committee's chairman, told a group of Tibetan Americans who attended the markup along with Office of Tibet and International Campaign for Tibet staff: "We're so glad that we've come to this great day where this committee will pass and move out of this committee this Tibetan resolution that will go to the House floor, pass, and I predict will pass the Senate and be signed into law."

## US support

The Resolve Tibet Act is the third major piece of US legislation on Tibet in just the past few years, following the enactment of the [Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act of 2018](#) and the [Tibetan Policy and Support Act of 2020](#).

The US, which has offered decades of consistent, bipartisan support for Tibet, continued to advocate for the Tibetan people in other ways in 2023.

In August, [Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced visa sanctions on Chinese officials](#) for their "involvement in the forcible assimilation of more than one million Tibetan children in government-run boarding schools."

Blinken also this year expressed concerns about reports of China's mass DNA collection in Tibet, making him the [senior-most US official to raise the issue publicly](#). The State Department also says that Blinken [raised human rights violations in Tibet during his trip to China](#) in June.

[President Joe Biden also raised Tibet with Xi Jinping](#) during their meeting in San Francisco in November. Unfortunately, that event was marred by [pro-China groups beating and harassing Tibetan and other protestors](#).

## Dalai Lama

In July, Under Secretary of State Uzra Zeya, who also serves as the US special coordinator for Tibetan issues, visited India, where [she and other US officials met with the Dalai Lama](#) just days after the celebration of the Tibetan spiritual leader's 88th birthday.

Right before his birthday, the Dalai Lama told reporters that China wants to contact him to deal with the situation in Tibet.

"I am always open to talk," he said. "Now China also realizes the Tibetan people, their spirit is very strong. So in order to deal with the Tibetan problem, they want to contact me. I am also ready."

## Around the world

Tibet received support from governments and institutions around the world in 2023.

In February, [three UN experts](#) announced they had written to China's government about the boarding schools in Tibet. The [UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights later called for an end to the boarding schools](#) in the concluding observations of its third periodic review of China.

The [German government also called on China to end its forced assimilation of Tibetan children](#), as did a [Czech Senate Committee](#). [Members of Parliament in Canada called for sanctions](#) against Chinese officials responsible for the boarding school system.

Just this month, the [European Parliament adopted a resolution](#) urging China to immediately abolish the boarding schools.

In April, [six UN special rapporteurs](#) warned that China's alleged "job transfer and vocational training programs" were being used as a pretext "to undermine Tibet's religion, language and culture, and to monitor and politically indoctrinate Tibetans."

In August, UN experts called on the Chinese government to provide information about [nine Tibetans imprisoned for their peaceful efforts to protect Tibet's environment](#).

Tibet was also raised at the [53rd session of the UN Human Rights Council](#), and the [UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) spotlighted China's boarding schools and extensive resettlement policies in Tibet.

After their annual summit in May, the [G7 leaders said in a communiqué](#): "We will keep voicing our concerns about the human rights situation in China, including in Tibet and Xinjiang where forced labor is of major concern to us."

## Looking ahead to 2024

In 2024, the International Campaign for Tibet looks forward to continuing to push for progress toward a peaceful resolution of the Tibet-China conflict.

In particular, ICT looks forward to the US House and Senate taking action on the Resolve Tibet Act.

The year will start on an important note as the [UN Human Rights Council conducts its Universal Periodic Review of China](#) on Jan. 23. ICT has called for nations to hold the Chinese government accountable for its severe human rights violations during the review in Geneva.

2024 will also mark the 65th anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising of March 10, 1959, when Tibetans rose united to challenge China's occupation of their homeland, leading to the Dalai Lama's escape into exile, keeping the Tibetan cause alive for more than six decades since.

Today, after 65 years, it is time for a peaceful resolution to China's oppression in Tibet.



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