



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

As Panchen Lama turns 35, China must free him

<http://www.savetibet.org/as-panchen-lama-turns-35-china-must-free-him>

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Today, the Panchen Lama, one of the most important leaders in Tibetan Buddhism, turns 35. But given his continued detention by Chinese authorities since 1995, rather than being able to celebrate this milestone birthday with him, his followers and supporters around the globe are using the opportunity to demand that China's government free him.

Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the 11th Panchen Lama, was born in Chinese-occupied Tibet on April 25, 1989.

At age 6, he was recognized by the Dalai Lama as the reincarnation of the previous Panchen Lama. But just three days after this recognition, Chinese authorities kidnapped the child and his parents. The Panchen Lama has not been seen since.

As we mark the Panchen Lama's 35th birthday today, the International Campaign for Tibet demands that China release him and allow him to take his rightful place at the Tashi Lhunpo Monastery, the traditional home of the Panchen Lama.

The Chinese government must also stop its continued interference in the selection of Tibetan Buddhist leaders, as well as its horrific ongoing separation of Tibetan children from their community.

ICT also calls on other governments to raise the pressure on Beijing to account for the Panchen Lama's whereabouts and well-being.

In particular, we urge US Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken, who is [currently visiting China](#), to raise the disappearance of the Panchen Lama in his private meetings with Chinese leaders, as well as publicly in front of the press.

Reverberating today

The kidnapping of the Panchen Lama nearly 30 years ago reverberates today in the Chinese government's compulsory, state-run boarding schools in Tibet, which have separated over 1 million Tibetan children from their families, language, religion and culture.

These schools teach almost entirely in the Chinese language with a curriculum geared toward Chinese subjects. Over time, they threaten the very survival of the Tibetan identity inside Tibet. Already, heartbreaking stories have emerged of Tibetan children returning home on school breaks, and their parents no longer being able to communicate with them.

China's abduction of the Panchen Lama also foreshadows its plans to interfere in the succession of the Dalai Lama, who is now 88 and has lived in India since the Chinese government forced him to flee into exile 65 years ago.

After kidnapping Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, Chinese authorities appointed another boy, Gyaltsen Norbu, as their Panchen Lama. Today, Gyaltsen Norbu is being made to serve Beijing as a mouthpiece and political agent.

China has also claimed authority to decide the next Dalai lama, but the Dalai Lama himself has categorically said that only he has the authority to decide on his reincarnation.

The disappearance of the Panchen Lama is also emblematic of China's iron rule in Tibet.

Under China's occupation, [Tibet now has a global freedom score of zero](#), according to the watchdog group Freedom House.

Tibetan resistance and resilience

Despite the Chinese government's brutality, the people of Tibet continue to show remarkable resistance and resilience.

Tibetans and Tibetan Buddhists around the globe have steadfastly rejected the Panchen Lama installed by the Chinese government.

Even after more than 65 years of occupation, China has failed to win over the Tibetan people. And nearly three decades after kidnapping the Panchen Lama, China is still unable to get Tibetans to accept its handpicked replacement.

Rather than try to interfere in the selection of Tibetan Buddhist leaders, the Chinese government should work with this Dalai Lama and the elected Tibetan leadership to resolve the issue of Tibet through peaceful negotiations.

And on the Panchen Lama's 35th birthday, rather than continue to hide this spiritual leader from the followers who will never forget him, China should at last free the Panchen Lama and let him return to his people.



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