



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

EU delegation's visit to Tibet underscores concerns about human rights situation

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A delegation of the European External Action Service (EEAS) undertook a rare side visit to the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region from 13-15 June as part of the 39th EU-China Human Rights Dialogue.

The delegation, headed by Paola Pampaloni, Deputy Managing Director for Asia and the Pacific in the EEAS, went to Nyingchi and Lhasa where it had the opportunity to visit boarding schools, municipalities, cultural and religious sites, relocated Tibetan families, as well as to a prison, which provided the delegation with a “certain understanding” of the situation on the ground, according to the EEAS [statement](#) following the visit. EU Representatives were however unable to exchange directly with individual prisoners.

Vincent Metten, ICT's EU Policy Director, said: "As Tibet remains deeply isolated from the international community, the EEAS delegation's field visit is of great political significance. It underscores the EU's serious concerns regarding human rights violations affecting the Tibetan people and the threats to their culture and identity. Ensuring access to Tibet for diplomats, journalists, and independent experts is crucial and the EU must adopt sanctions to hold Chinese officials accountable for these severe restrictions."

The EU-China Human Rights Dialogue – which ICT and others human rights organisation have criticized for its lack of effectiveness – took place on 16 June in Chongqing. According to the EEAS statement, EU once again reiterated its concerns about the “very serious human rights situation” including in Tibetan areas during the talks, and also called for the immediate release of detained Tibetans [Go Sherab Gyatso](#) and [Dorjee Tashi](#).

Freedom of religion and succession of the Dalai Lama

The EU said it also stressed that the selection of religious leaders – including of the successor to the Dalai Lama - should happen “without any government interference and in respect of religious norms” - a position already [expressed](#) by the EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell in 2020 and other European governments.

Rare visits to Tibet

The EU had introduced an official request to visit Tibet several years ago, but the request was never approved by the Chinese authorities. EU Council President Charles Michel [raised](#) this issue with Chinese President Xi Jinping during an EU-China leaders' meeting already in 2020, saying he hoped the EU would be able to make a field visit during the next Human Rights Dialogue.

The Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) - which spans about half of historical Tibet - is uniquely subjected to wide-ranging restrictions on access. These restrictions are not in force in any other provincial-level entity in the People's Republic of China.

The visits of EU officials to Tibet are extremely rare and can be counted on the fingers of one hand. The EU's chief diplomat Josep Borrell visited Tibet (including Lhasa), when he was President of the European Parliament in 2006. He was followed in 2009 by another head of an EU Institution, the President of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), Mario Sepi.

In 2017, the EU Ambassador to China, Hans Dietmar Schweisgut, and a group of Ambassadors of EU member states to China paid an official visit to the TAR at the invitation of the TAR authorities. Stavros Lambrinidis, the former EU Special Representative for Human Rights, was the last high-level EU official to have been allowed to [visit Tibet in September 2013](#).

Continued lack of access

The rare visits to Tibet granted to foreign diplomats, official, journalists are meticulously orchestrated and scrutinized by the Chinese authorities, reminiscent of the Potemkin village tours under the Soviet regime, allowing China to shape the narrative in alignment with the interests and policies of the Chinese Communist Party.

A recent [US State Department report](#) has highlighted these continued restrictions on access to Tibet, underlining that US officials made three requests for official travel to the TAR in 2023, none of which was approved.

It is therefore important to carefully evaluate the findings and outcomes of such visits ICT suggests.

About Tibet

China has occupied Tibet, a historically independent, neighboring country, for over six-and-a-half decades. This year marked the 65th anniversary of Chinese troops forcing the Dalai Lama to escape into exile in March 1959.

Under China's rule, Tibet is now one of the worst human rights crisis zones in the world. The watchdog group Freedom House recently gave Tibet a global freedom score of 0 out of a possible 100.

Despite the Chinese government's severe oppression, the Tibetan people continue to show remarkable resistance and resilience and have stayed committed to resolving China's occupation of their homeland through peaceful dialogue.



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