



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Tibetan rights advocates on school closures in Tibet at UN Human Rights Council

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September 18, 2024

Tibetans and Tibet supporters took the stage at a United Nations Human Rights Council side event in Geneva yesterday, testifying about China's suppression of the Tibetan language and the recent school closures in Tibet.

The event, which was hosted by the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, was moderated by Kai Mueller of the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) and featured testimony from Palmo Tenzin, a senior researcher at ICT, Tenzin Choekyi, a senior researcher for Tibet Watch, and Gloria Montgomery from the Tibet Justice Center. The panel discussion took place in the Geneva Palais des Nations on the margins of the current Human Rights Council session and was well attended by representatives from missions to the United Nations.

After the testimony, and in front of an audience of delegates from other countries, China's representatives responded by bluntly denying the facts of the situation inside Tibet.

Tencho Gyatso, President of the International Campaign for Tibet, said: "Tibet's advocates at the UN should be commended for laying out the reality of Chinese misrule in Tibet so clearly that even Beijing can't ignore it. Instead of lying to the world, China must acknowledge that Tibetans have every right to be educated in their mother tongue and stop trying to forcibly erase Tibet's rich heritage of languages and dialects in favor of Chinese. This means that Tibetans must be able to run their own schools, as guaranteed by international law."

Tibet testimony

After an introduction from Kai Mueller, Tenzin Choekyi was the first to speak. She traced the history of Tibetans protesting for language rights and the consequences they have faced for speaking out. She stressed that influential Tibetans, community leaders, intellectuals, writers, songwriters, entrepreneurs, musicians, and ordinary Tibetans with uncompromising resolve for justice, are being watched, detained, tortured - sometimes even to death- or imprisoned under trumped-up charges.

Palmo Tenzin added: "Tibetan children lose their mother tongue, are unable to speak to their relatives, are unable to navigate Tibetan society, and are unable to access Tibetan history, culture, and even their relationship to land and place," she said after noting that Tibetans inside Tibet are unable to speak freely about this issue in the face of Chinese repression. Tenzin also laid out recent policy changes in the educational sector that have a detrimental effect on the Tibetan language and on Tibetan culture.

The final speaker, Gloria Montgomery, issued a stark warning about China's closures of Tibetan schools and cited China's obligations under international law to allow for Tibetan education, among them international covenants ratified by the PRC which protect the establishment and maintenance of privately run schools.

Chinese response

In a sign of the growing importance of UN events on Tibet, China chose to attend and speak instead of skipping the panel or delegating it to one of their proxy organizations. Their response – to deny the facts instead of taking Tibetan testimony and facts to heart – is symptomatic of Beijing's disregard for Tibetan rights and their willingness to deceive the international community on the situation in Tibet.

One hundred Tibetan and Himalayan scholars recently [appealed](#) to UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk calling for an end to China's forced assimilation policies in Tibet. In the petition 100 Tibetan professors, scientists and doctoral students in exile express their deep concern about the Chinese government's systematic closure of Tibetan monastic and public schools.



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