



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Young Tibetan speaks out against illegal mining in video statement

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In a brave act that highlights the challenges of environmental stewardship in Tibet under Chinese rule, a young Tibetan whistleblower from the Tibetan town of Ngaba (Chinese: Aba) has taken to WeChat, China's ubiquitous social media platform, to expose the ecological devastation occurring in his native Tsaruma (*Chá'ěrmǎ*) hometown.

The video statement, which surfaced this week, paints a grim picture of ecological and environmental neglect, corporate irresponsibility, and the Chinese government's unwillingness to protect Asia's water tower. The Tsaruma river, which runs through Tsaruma township in Kakhog¹ (Hongyuan) County, Ngaba (Aba), Sichuan, is a tributary at the source of many of Asia's river systems including two of China's longest rivers, the Yangtze and Yellow rivers.

Ongoing environmental damage

This incident is not isolated but rather symptomatic of broader challenges facing Tibet's environment and its defenders. Tibetan environmental defenders have faced persecution for their activism as documented in the International Campaign for Tibet's (ICT) report [Environmental Defenders of Tibet: China's Persecution of Tibetan Environmental Defenders](#). ICT is deeply concerned that the 29-year-old Tibetan whistleblower is at risk of persecution for expressing his frustration at the environmental damage and seeking redress publicly.

Perhaps most frustrating for the local Tibetan community is the apparent inaction of authorities at various levels. The whistleblower reveals that multiple complaints and appeals have been lodged with different government bodies, yet no effective action has been taken to halt the illegal mining activities, even though the authorities have acknowledged the illegality of sand and gravel excavation from the river. He also states that early this year, the Discipline Inspection Commission and Development Bureau of Kakhog County reviewed and acknowledged the illegal sand mining activity. However, these party-state bodies at the county level reportedly lie to higher authorities and deceive people at the lower level by claiming that no one raised objections, which the whistleblower asserts is an outright lie and a violation of the petition system.

In an apparent sign of utter frustration and last resort, the man identified himself and showed his identity card on camera while stating that he is appealing to China's leaders at top level for intervention. He urges the top leaders to visit the site, investigate the issue, uncover collusion

¹ Hongyuan County, under the current Chinese administrative division, is known by several Tibetan names. Kakhog, Khyungchu, and Marthang are Tibetan names for the area officially called Hongyuan in Chinese.

between government and businesses, determine who is at fault, and rectify the situation. This escalation to the highest echelons of Chinese power underscores the exhaustion of local and regional channels for redress and the desperation felt by the Tibetan community in Tsaruma in the face of ongoing environmental destruction.

The whistle blower states on video with visual evidence that the large Chinese construction company Anhui Xianhe Construction Engineering Company has been illegally mining sand and gravel from Tsaruma river during the company's road construction in the township. He states that illegal sand mining activities have severely damaged the local environment since May 2023. Additionally, the activity has caused serious soil erosion in the surrounding areas, endangering the foundations of residents' houses.

Full translation of the statement in the video clip

My name is [name withheld], and I currently reside in Tsaruma (Chinese: *Chá'ěrmǎ*) Township, Kakhog (Hongyuan) County, Ngaba (Aba) Prefecture, Sichuan Province. I am reporting this under my real name. Anhui Xianhe Construction Engineering Co., Ltd has illegally excavated sand and gravel from the river way during the road construction in Tsaruma Township. Since May 2023, the company's illegal sand mining activities have severely damaged the local ecological environment. Large amounts of sand have been recklessly excavated from the river, leading to serious soil erosion near residents' homes and endangering house foundations. The excavated Tsaruma River is a tributary of the upper Yangtze and Yellow River. This destructive behavior seriously threatens the safety of water resources of the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers. The issue of pollution of tributaries of these rivers closely related to the local ecological environment and biodiversity protection, directly affecting the Asian Water Tower and wetlands on the plateau. Therefore, strengthening ecological protection and governance is crucial.

Regarding such serious ecological destruction and its profound impact on local residents, some villagers spontaneously reported to the local government of Tsaruma Township, Kakhog County Discipline Inspection Commission, Kakhog County Environmental Protection Bureau, Kakhog County Water Affairs Bureau, Ngaba Prefecture Water Affairs Bureau, Ngaba Prefecture Environmental Protection Department and other relevant departments, providing a large number of on-site photos and videos of the damage. However, the relevant departments turned a deaf ear and remained indifferent, neglecting their duties in the handling process, failing to thoroughly address environmental issues, and allowing the harm to local people to persist. This has left complainants with nowhere to turn to and no one to manage the situation. Although good ecological environmental protection policies were introduced many years ago, there are still problems in implementation in our area.

In April 2024, although the Ecological Environment Bureau of Kakhog County, Ngaba Prefecture, Sichuan Province issued a petition response to me, confirming that "the illegal excavation of sand and gravel from the river by Anhui Xianhe Construction Engineering Co., Ltd. in Tsaruma was true and had been filed for punishment and closed", this is a cover-up and protection of the relevant enterprise, using fines as a substitute for management, and downplaying the issue. In the end, the restoration of the ecological environment and the treatment of soil erosion were not carried out. Only low-cost, perfunctory measures were taken to address areas where house foundations were endangered. The threat of soil erosion in the surrounding area continues to exist, the situation of soil erosion is becoming increasingly serious, and the situation is getting more severe. The consequences of ecological destruction are all borne by the local people. According to the Environmental Protection Law, in addition to necessary penalties for damage to the ecological environment, the damaged environment should also be restored. However, the Ecological Environment Bureau of Kakhog County failed to effectively fulfill its responsibilities in handling this matter and failed to effectively stop and correct the behavior that damaged the environment.

In addition, the Ecological Environment Bureau of Kakhog County claimed in its petition response that "after receiving the first petition in September 2023, it reported to the Kakhog County Committee of

the Communist Party of China and the Kakhog County People's Government. The main leaders and deputy leaders of the county committee and county government led teams multiple times to verify and investigate relevant issues, arranging multiple departments and townships to verify and investigate. The transportation and water affairs departments handled the matter according to laws and regulations. The results of the investigation and handling have been relayed back to the pastoralists of Tsaruma Township in writing or in person many times." This issue was subject to multiple re-examinations by departments such as the Ngaba Prefecture Water Affairs Bureau from October to December 2023.

In early 2024, the Discipline Inspection Commission and Development Committee of Kakhog County also re-examined the relevant issues and handling, and claimed no one raised objections. However, as the complainant, I am completely unaware of and unfamiliar with the above statements, and no Tsaruma Township pastoralists have ever received any relevant feedback. The so-called "no objections raised" is purely fictitious. This kind of deceptive response is extremely irresponsible and seriously desecrates and tramples on the petition system, causing it to operate in vain. Due to the low cost of violations, illegal activities have become rampant. Over time, environmental damage issues will become increasingly serious and frequent, and the consequences will be beyond imagination. When the environment is damaged to a certain extent, the collapse of the ecosystem will be an irreversible disaster. We have lived on this land for generations after generations, and the quality of the ecological environment is directly related to the health and life safety of our future generations. If environmental problems are not resolved according to law, similar problems will follow.

I hereby implore the leadership of the Central Government to pay attention to this issue, adhere to the concept of ecological protection that "blue waters and green mountains are golden mountains and silver mountains", uphold the spirit of "seeking truth from facts", conduct on-site investigations of the damaged local ecological environment, thoroughly investigate the legal responsibilities of illegal enterprises according to law, hold accountable the dereliction of duty of relevant department leaders, thoroughly investigate and rectify possible official-business collusion, rent-seeking and other corrupt practices, and restore an environment where people can live and work in peace and contentment, returning prosperity to the region.



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