



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

UN Forum: ICT highlights erasure of Tibetan identity through the PRC's educational policies

<https://savetibet.org/un-forum-ict-highlights-erasure-of-tibetan-identity-through-the-prcs-educational-policies>

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In a statement delivered yesterday at the 17th UN Forum on Minority Issues in Geneva, the International Campaign for Tibet expressed its deep concern over the Chinese government's systematic erasure of the Tibetan people's identity through its education policies.

The two-day Forum, held on November 28-29, 2024, focused this year on the topic of "Minority representation and self-representation in public spaces and discourses." "Denying minorities a voice is the first step towards denying their wider rights," stressed UN High Commissioner Volker Türk in his opening remarks, adding that it "creates space for ugly, false representations of minorities that perpetuates stereotypes, fuels prejudice and incite hostility." This is exactly what China is doing with its so-called "minorities" such as Tibetans and Uyghurs. By portraying Tibetans as backward and in need being modernized, China perpetuates harmful stereotypes that undermine Tibetan identity while fueling resentment among Tibetans, who see these narratives as demeaning and dismissive of their rich cultural heritage.

Speaking at the forum under the item on "minority representation in education", ICT's Policy and Advocacy Officer Mélanie Blondelle detailed how schools in Tibet have increasingly been used as tool to assimilate Tibetan children – meaning molding them into the dominant Han Chinese culture. She highlighted how Tibetan children in state-run schools are primarily taught in Mandarin, with a curriculum that is culturally irrelevant and deeply misrepresentative of Tibetan history and heritage. This is exacerbated by the coercive boarding school system and the closure of private-run Tibetan schools (recently illustrated by the [closure of the Taktsang Lhamo monastic school](#)).

"Education should value cultural diversity, not destroy it. Tibetan children deserve to grow up knowing who they are, where they come from, and to take pride in their heritage," Blondelle concluded, urging China to respect its international obligations with regards to the rights of Tibetan children.

Created 17 years ago, the UN Forum on Minority Issues serves as a platform to foster dialogue and cooperation on matters concerning minority groups. This year's session saw its highest attendance since its establishment, with over 690 representatives from minority communities, governments, NGOs, and UN bodies and agencies registered. While ICT rejects the term "minority" for the Tibetan people, the organisation uses the forum to advocate for the rights of the Tibetans.

Tibet was also in the spotlight in Geneva during an awarding ceremony of the [International Contest for Minority Artists](#) on November 26, where Tibetan artist Laowu Kuang was rewarded for his work deeply entrenched in the themes of memory, freedom and human rights. In his acceptance speech, he perfectly illustrated the lack of Tibetan language education in Tibet, explaining he was delivering his speech in Chinese as he could only receive Chinese education since he was a child, and that in his

native village in Ngaba (Chinese: Aba) almost no Tibetan from his generation could speak in their mother tongue.

Read ICT's full statement below or watch on [UN Web TV](#) (from 01:14:47).

ICT statement

17th UN Forum on Minority Issues
28-29 November 2024 – Geneva

Item 2: Minority representation in education

Statement by the International Campaign for Tibet

Mr. Chair,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The International Campaign for Tibet would like to draw the Forum's attention to the systematic erasure of the Tibetan people's identity within China's education system.

In recent years, education has been increasingly weaponized by the Chinese government as a tool for its assimilationist agenda in Tibet. In this context, Tibetan children in state-run schools are primarily taught in Mandarin, with a curriculum that lacks cultural relevance to them. They are presented with a distorted view of their culture and history, in which their way of life is denigrated as backward, their revered spiritual leader the Dalai Lama vilified, and their history manipulated to align with the ideology and interests of the Chinese Communist Party.¹ This is not education, but indoctrination aimed at severing young Tibetans from their very roots.

This is compounded by a coercive boarding school system that separates Tibetan children as young as 4 from their families and communities, alienating them further from their culture and traditions and leading to deep psychological trauma and loss of identity.

At the same time, private-run schools that still allowed parents to educate their children in their native language and culture have been increasingly forced to shut down. Monastic schools, once bastions of education and transmission of Buddhist heritage, have been particularly targeted.²

These policies constitute a grave violation of Tibetan children's rights, as highlighted by multiple UN human rights treaty bodies and Special procedures. They also pose an existential threat to Tibet's ancient and rich culture - a culture of compassion and harmony that is more relevant than ever in these troubled times.

¹ As one former Tibetan student noted: *"Our teachers drove us to hate our heritage, our elders, and even our parents... We felt ashamed of our cultural background; we developed an antipathy to our socio-cultural world itself."* Huatse Gyal, 2021, 'Our Indigenous Land is Not a Wasteland', American Ethnologist website, 6 February 2021, <https://americanethnologist.org/features/reflections/our-indigenous-land-is-not-a-wasteland>.

² A recent example is the closure of the Taktsang Lhamo monastic school, located in Dzoge (Chinese: Ruò'ěrgài) County in Ngaba Prefecture, Sichuan. Monastic schools in Ngaba targeted amid crackdown on Tibetan-language education, International Campaign for Tibet, 8 November 2024, <https://savetibet.org/monastic-schools-in-ngaba-targeted-amid-crackdown-on-tibetan-language-education>

Education should value cultural diversity, not destroy it. Tibetan children deserve to grow up in an environment that allows them to know who they are, and where they come from and to be proud of their heritage.

We therefore urge the Chinese government to respect the rights of Tibetan children guaranteed by international law, such as the UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, both of which China has ratified.

Thank you.



International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) | 1825 Jefferson Place NW | Washington, DC 20036 | United States of America
Phone: (202) 785-1515 | Fax: (202) 785-4343 | info@savetibet.org

ICT Europe
Funenpark 1D | 1018 AK
Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Phone: +31 (0)20 3308265
Fax: +31 (0)20 3308266
icteurope@savetibet.nl

ICT Deutschland e.V.
Schönhauser Allee 163 | 10435
Berlin, Germany
Phone: +49 (0)30 27879086
Fax: +49 (0)30 27879087
info@savetibet.de

ICT Brussels
11, rue de la linière | 1060
Brussels, Belgium
Phone: +32 (0)2 609 44 10
Fax: +32 (0)2 609 44 32
info@savetibet.eu