



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

ICT calls for timely, independent information and access to Tibet on humanitarian grounds after Nepal-Tibet disaster

<https://savetibet.org/ict-calls-for-timely-independent-information-and-access-to-tibet-on-humanitarian-grounds-after-nepal-tibet-disaster>

September 3, 2026

Families of the missing remain without answers as China restricts access, punishes at least 19 people for flood posts challenging official casualty figures and amplifies the state's account of relief efforts.

In the wake of the catastrophic floods and mudslides along the Nepal-Tibet border on August 26, the International Campaign for Tibet has called for the immediate release of complete, timely and independently verifiable information on casualties, missing people and conditions in Kyirong (Chinese: Jilong; also referred to as Gyirong) County in Shigatse, Tibet, together with meaningful access for independent journalists and observers.

These measures are urgently required on humanitarian grounds: to help families determine the fate and whereabouts of missing relatives, identify affected communities and unmet needs, and support an effective rescue and relief operation. [ICT is also calling for unhindered access](#) for international humanitarian organizations and for governments worldwide to press Beijing to provide information and access commensurate with the scale of the disaster.

Those demands have become more urgent as [Chinese authorities impose severe information controls and punish people for online posts](#) that authorities characterize as “rumors,” including claims that the death toll in Tibet is considerably higher than official figures indicate. Official Chinese media reported on September 3 that seven additional people had been summoned, penalized or reprimanded for posting flood-related information. An August 31 statement by the Ministry of Public Security’s cybersecurity department said authorities had imposed “administrative penalties” on 10 people, which included seven who were punished for stating that the actual death toll was more than 1,000. ICT’s latest accounting indicates that at least 19 people have now been targeted or punished in connection with disaster-related posts.

Chinese authorities reported 21 people dead and 541 missing in Tibet as of midday September 2 and had announced no further change in the toll by September 3. Their August 30 update said that 261 of those missing were foreign nationals from 23 countries, including 104 people from Nepal, 49 from India, 33 from Latvia, 18 from the United States and 15 from the United Kingdom. None of these official figures can be independently verified while journalists, international humanitarian organizations and other independent observers remain barred from the affected area.

For families of the missing, the resulting information vacuum has prolonged days of uncertainty and denied them credible, timely answers about the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones. Chinese officials said that, by noon on September 2, authorities had received 876 calls concerning people reported dead or missing -- 448 domestic calls and 428 international calls -- underscoring the scale of the demand for authoritative information.

“ICT’s call for greater transparency and access to information arises first and foremost from humanitarian considerations,” said Tencho Gyatso, President of the International Campaign for Tibet. “In a disaster of this scale, timely and reliable information can help save lives.”

Reports sourced from inside Tibet

Sources told ICT that survivors and displaced residents have been evacuated to Kyirong town and are being kept under centralized supervision, with communications and visitors restricted. ICT sources on August 30 reported mandatory government-organized propaganda and “psychological counseling” sessions at these venues. According to [Chinese state media on September 3](#), authorities said a team of 70 professionals had been assigned to provide

psychological counseling to families of people reported dead or missing and had delivered care 1,107 times. They added that 1,220 personnel had been organized to support these services.

Sources told ICT that four villages, including Rizi, Sale, Serchung and Labi, were among the hardest-hit in Kyirong County, and reported that many remain unaccounted for. ICT also received reports that rescue workers did not reach some communities until roughly 50 hours after the flooding. Sources said around 140 survivors from Sale, including children from a local boarding school, were evacuated on the third day. Tibetans from other areas who sought to deliver relief directly were reportedly required to transfer funds and supplies to government authorities and barred from providing direct assistance, sources said.

Chinese authorities have publicized the state's response and rescue efforts via official state media. Officials said the regional government activated its highest natural-disaster emergency level; the central government allocated 220 million yuan for relief and emergency recovery; and 2,141 personnel, 269 rescue vehicles and 3,922 pieces or sets of rescue equipment were mobilized. They also reported that 499 people from five high-risk villages were evacuated to five resettlement sites, 555 domestic tourists were transferred, and more than 57,000 relief items were distributed.

The scale of the announced response underscores the gravity of the disaster, but official reporting cannot substitute for independent scrutiny of whether assistance has reached every affected community, whether the official casualty figures are complete or whether survivors can communicate their experiences and needs without restriction.

Information control and amplification of state narrative

Severe restrictions on speech and access have made ground-level information from Tibet exceptionally difficult to obtain. Local residents are afraid to share details even when contact can be established, with one source telling ICT that it was “extremely unsafe” to speak and another urging ICT not to make further contact because of the critical situation. These warnings illustrate how the crackdown is obstructing not only public reporting but also basic efforts to determine the condition of affected communities.

Sources told ICT that WeChat groups and comment sections are closely moderated to amplify praise for the government response and remove criticism. State media have concentrated on leadership directives, road repairs, deployment figures and officially organized relief, while providing limited community-level information about casualties, missing people and survivors' experiences. Foreign correspondents or independent media have not been permitted independent access to Tibet, while videos and other firsthand documentation posted to Chinese social-media platforms have disappeared.

Under the ongoing “Clear and Bright: Cyberspace Cleanup” campaign, Chinese authorities have also penalized, summoned or reprimanded people who shared information about the Kyirong floods or questioned official statistics. An August 30 government notice disclosed administrative penalties were imposed on at least 10 individuals for spreading disaster “rumors” online; of these, seven posts claimed that more than 1,000 people had died. ICT also learned of separate case where two people in Lhokha were questioned, subjected to “criticism and education” and required to delete posts authorities described as false or exaggerated. On September 3, a local report said seven more people had been summoned, penalized or reprimanded for flood-related posts.

ICT's latest accounting indicates that at least 19 people have now faced some form of police or administrative action for allegedly spreading “rumors” about the disaster.

The restrictions appear integral to the official disaster response. At a September 1 emergency-relief meeting, Wang Junzheng, Communist Party Secretary of the Tibet Autonomous Region, emphasized adherence to Xi Jinping's directives and political thought. According to the official account of the meeting, Wang also prioritized control of online public opinion, “stability maintenance” and the safeguarding of long-term political stability.

Penalizing the circulation of disaster information entrenches fear and self-censorship at the moment when accurate reporting is most consequential. Official images of rescue operations, however valuable, are no substitute for independent journalists interviewing survivors, unhindered humanitarian access, systematic updates to affected families and a credible village-by-village accounting of the dead and missing.

Tibetan and international advocates bring Tibet's information crisis to global attention

Since the onset of the disaster, ICT along with other Tibetan and international Tibet-support groups, human rights organizations, advocacy networks, and activists have mobilized international media attention to ensure that conditions inside Tibet -- and the consequences of Beijing's restrictions -- remain part of the global response.

ICT President Tencho Gyatso highlighted the disparity between open reporting from Nepal and the controlled information environment in Tibet. "What is visible in Nepal exposes what is being concealed in Tibet," Gyatso told [The Guardian](#). In television interviews with [CNBC-TV18](#) and [Sky News](#), and in separate interactions with [La Croix](#), AFP, [Le Monde](#), and others, Gyatso emphasized that the outside world was being shown the Chinese Communist Party's account of the response rather than a comprehensive picture of the disaster's impact on Tibetan communities.

ICT Executive Director Ryan Fioresi's comments to [The New York Times](#), [CNN](#) and [BBC Newshour](#) focused on the scarcity of verifiable information from Tibet, the exclusion of independent journalists and observers, and the international community's dependence on Chinese state media. He stressed, in interviews with NPR, [Radio Free Asia](#), [ABC News Australia](#) and other outlets, that official coverage prioritized Xi Jinping's directives and descriptions of state relief efforts over survivors' experiences and the full extent of the casualties and destruction.

In an Op-ed in [The Diplomat](#), Fioresi also argued that the disaster exposed a broader, CCP-imposed information vacuum in Tibet and called for open access, stronger regional sharing of disaster-risk information and an adequate response for missing foreign nationals. ICT EU Policy Director Vincent Matten's op-ed in the [La Libre Belgique](#) extended ICT's public advocacy on the Nepal-Tibet disaster to Belgian and European audiences.

ICT representatives also engaged [Deutsche Welle](#), [The Telegraph](#), [ZDF Heute](#), [Tagesschau](#), [El País](#), NPR, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Tagesspiegel* and other media. ICT Germany Executive Director Kai Müller emphasized that information control prevents an independent assessment of both the death toll and whether relief is reaching Tibetan communities.

"The people affected by this catastrophe deserve the fullest possible rescue and humanitarian response," Gyatso said. "They also deserve the freedom to communicate what has happened to them. Transparency and independent access should strengthen the rescue effort, not threaten it."

Advocacy efforts: pressing Beijing and mobilizing government

ICT's advocacy is directed both at Chinese authorities and at governments with the diplomatic leverage and responsibility to press Beijing for greater transparency.

In its letter to U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, ICT urged the State Department to publicly express condolences for those affected in Tibet, seek greater transparency regarding casualties and missing persons, and encourage access to affected areas for humanitarian assistance and independent reporting.

The international dimensions of the disaster are already driving government engagement. The U.S. State Department has [issued information for U.S. citizens](#) and reported Americans unaccounted for in China and Nepal. [British authorities have coordinated with local authorities](#) regarding missing UK nationals, while [Latvian and Canadian diplomatic missions have sought updates from Chinese authorities](#) regarding their citizens. These consular efforts underscore the direct interest governments have in reliable information from Tibet. Publicly documented governmental demands for independent access and comprehensive disclosure, however, remain limited -- reinforcing ICT's call for governments to move beyond case-by-case consular coordination and press China collectively for transparency.

ICT is calling on the international community, the United States, the European Union and other governments and institutions to:

- Press Chinese authorities to disclose complete, timely and independently verifiable information on casualties, missing persons, damage and humanitarian needs.

- Secure meaningful access for independent journalists, international humanitarian organizations and other independent observers to affected Tibetan areas.
- Ensure that survivors and families of residents, foreign nationals can communicate freely, locate one another and share information with the outside world without intimidation or punishment.
- Press for independent humanitarian access and assessment through the United Nations.
- Request UN satellite analysis of affected areas to help establish the scale of destruction and identify unmet needs.
- Provide assistance for Tibetans on both sides of the border.
- Protect families' ability to recover and mourn their loved ones according to Tibetan Buddhist traditions.
- Coordinate consular information concerning missing foreign nationals and demand regular, disaggregated public updates from Chinese authorities.

The Central Tibetan Administration has launched emergency relief efforts for Tibetan communities in Nepal and [appealed to Tibetans in exile to contribute voluntarily](#) through Offices of Tibet and Tibetan settlement offices. The CTA identified Shabru settlement and Timure, near the Kyirong border, as among the hardest-hit Tibetan communities on the Nepal side. Five Tibetan families in Timure were reported to have been swept away by the deluge. In the Rasuwa Geygheling Tibetan settlement, all 11 homes were swept away by the floods, CTA said.

[His Holiness the Dalai Lama expressed condolences](#) and called attention to the need to understand the disaster's underlying causes. "Since this region has seen calamities in the past as well, these are certainly symptoms of a deeper underlying cause—whether climate change or other factors," he said. "I hope that appropriate follow-up measures will be taken, wherever possible, to help ensure that such disasters do not recur."

Long-term warning

The immediate priority is rescue and humanitarian support, but the disaster is also a warning for the wider Himalayan region. Kyirong has experienced repeated flood and disaster disruption in recent years. Extreme rainfall, rising temperatures, glacial and permafrost melt, earthquakes and unstable slopes create compound risks across a region where hazards do not stop at political borders.

ICT urges Beijing to support a joint scientific investigation, with regional and international participation, into the causes of the August 26 event and the increasing frequency of destructive floods. The findings should be published openly, and glacial-lake risk assessments for Tibet should be made public. No dam or infrastructure project should be blamed for this event without evidence.

ICT also calls for a permanent disaster-data-sharing arrangement between China and downstream Himalayan states; stronger high-altitude monitoring and early-warning systems; and meaningful participation by Tibetan communities in decisions affecting their land and safety.



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