



General Assembly

Distr.: General
13 June 2012

English only

Human Rights Council

Twentieth session

Agenda item 4

Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[4 June 2012]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

The human rights situation in the Tibet Autonomous Region and other Tibetan-populated areas of China

The International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR) wishes to draw the attention of the Human Rights Council to the situation of human rights in the Tibet Autonomous Region and other Tibetan-populated areas of China. Information received by IFOR indicates that since the popular uprisings of March 2008 severe limitations have been imposed on the freedoms of peaceful assembly, association, expression and religion or belief, all of which are supposedly guaranteed by the constitution of China itself. There has also been a heavy military build-up; it is reported that 26 new military or paramilitary camps have been set up in the Tibetan-populated prefecture of Karze (Ganzi)¹ in China's Sichuan Province alone. There are specific reports of arbitrary detention, of enforced and involuntary disappearances, of torture, and of a sustained campaign of political interference with the internal affairs of Tibetan monasteries and nunneries which directly threatens the freedom of the population to maintain its religious traditions. A wave of self-immolations has represented a desperate attempt to draw the world's attention to the plight of the Tibetan people. Currently the internet and phone lines in Tibet are blocked, and foreign journalists are barred from entering all restive Tibetan areas. This could enable any outbreaks of popular dissent to be put down with ruthlessness and impunity.

Self-immolations

Between February 2009 and 30th May 2012 at least 39 Tibetans², including 17 monks or nuns, set themselves alight in protest against the harsh treatment of peaceful protestors, the programmes of “patriotic re-education” in monasteries and the denial of basic human rights. Of the 39, 29 are known to have died; the fate of the others is not known. Many of the bodies of those known to have died have not been returned to the families for funeral according to Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

Five cases have been reported from the town of Ngaba in which self-immolators were shot or beaten by the Chinese security forces while on fire, namely:

- Tapey, a monk from the Kirti monastery, aged in his 20s, who set himself alight on 27th February 2009. He was shot by members of the People's Armed Police and fell to the ground. The police then doused the flames and took him away. Whether he survived is not known.
- Phuntsok Jarutsang, aged 20, of the same monastery, self-immolated on 16th March 2011 and died the next day. Eyewitnesses reported that Chinese authorities beat Phuntsok as they put out the flames. Six monks, including Phuntsok's brother and uncle, were sentenced in connection with this self-immolation.
- Norbu Dramdul, 19, a former monk from Kirti, burned himself on 15th October 2011 and died on 5th January 2012. Eyewitnesses reported that he was chased by police who extinguished the flames, beat him, and took him away in a police vehicle.

¹ Our sources give the Tibetan version of place names; we quote the Chinese names in brackets.

² Including one in New Delhi, India on 23rd March 2012.

- Lobsang Jamyang, 21, set himself alight on 14th January 2012. The police extinguished the flames and beat him. Tibetan eye-witnesses became distressed and a spontaneous protest took place in which a large crowd tried to retrieve the dying man. More police arrived and opened fire; it is alleged that at least two people were shot. Jamyang himself died either at the time, or two days later.
- Lobsang Tsultrim, 20, of Kirti Monastery, self-immolated on 16th March 2012, and died on 19th March. While he burned, the Chinese police allegedly knocked him down, beat him, and threw him into the back of a truck.

Arbitrary detention, enforced or involuntary disappearances, and torture

On 23 January 2012, there was a large, peaceful demonstration in Drango (Luhuo) County, Kardze (Ganze) Prefecture. Many monks from the Drango monastery took part. The same day, the Chinese authorities arrested a senior religious leader, Tulku Lobsang Tenzin, and three monks, Geshe Tsewang Namgyal, Thinlay and Dalha, all from that monastery, who were visiting the city of Chengdu in a different part of the province of Sichuan. The current whereabouts of the four are unknown.

In Drango County itself, between 25th January and 10th February, the security forces arrested two monks, Shonu and Tsering Gyaltzen, and six laypersons: Yonten Sangpo, Sherkyam, Peldor, Gyekyab, Khengdo and Gyaltzen. Their current whereabouts are also unknown.

Hundreds of Tibetans detained in January 2012 after returning from a pilgrimage to India and Nepal, are still being held (at their own cost) in hotels in and around Lhasa. The detentions followed reports that around 9,000 visitors from Tibet attended the Kalachakra teaching given by the Dalai Lama at Bodh Gaya in the Indian state of Bihar between the 1st and 10th of January. The detainees, some aged over 80 or in poor health, have been interrogated about their activities and contacts in India and subjected to intense “political education” sessions. Their families are said to have been kept in the dark as to their exact whereabouts or when they might be released.

Tibetans from the eastern regions of Kham and Amdo who were detained in the same operation have after interrogation been referred to the provincial authorities in Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu and Yunnan. Those who landed at Chengdu airport on their way back home to the Tibetan areas in Sichuan and Yunnan provinces were detained in that city itself; their fate and whereabouts remain unknown.

A highly respected Tibetan Buddhist monk arrested in July 2011 in Tsolho (Hainan) prefecture, apparently for his role in the March 2008 protest in Qinghai province, died on 22nd January 2012, shortly after his release from detention, allegedly as a result of torture he had undergone while in prison. According to Beijing-based Tibetan poet and blog activist Ms Woese, Geshe Tsultrim Gyaltsso, 51, who had played what she termed a "pivotal" role in the preservation and protection of the Tibetan language and culture, had been taken to hospital at the end of December 2011 and from there, incapacitated and looking frail, had been handed over to his family just a few days before his death. This is not the first time that it has been alleged that the Chinese authorities have released severely tortured prisoners in order to avoid responsibility for their death in prison.

Interference with the running of Tibetan monasteries and nunneries

Since October 2011, ‘work teams’ instituted by the Chinese government have been conducting “patriotic re-education” sessions in Tibetan monasteries and nunneries, in order to produce “Harmonious Model Monasteries” and “law-abiding, patriotic and advanced” monks and nuns. Instead of Tibetan Buddhism and a philosophy based on compassion, the monks and nuns are forced to study Communist Chinese doctrines and to denounce their spiritual leader, His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The “work teams” have also taken over the complete authority and management of the monasteries from the monks. Monks and nuns are arrested and punished for not complying with the work teams’ orders.

Five monks of Ungting Monastery in Dachu Township of Ngamring (Angren) County of Shigatse Prefecture, Tibet Autonomous Region, were arrested for opposing the “patriotic education”, including the order to fly the Chinese Red Star flag in the monastery.

In Markham (Maerkang) County of Chamdo Prefecture, 22 of the 30 resident monks at the Dama Monastery were expelled for not being registered with the government. The monastery is in danger of being closed down for refusing to replace a portrait of the Dalai Lama with one presented by the Chinese authorities, showing Mao, Deng, Jiang and Hu.

Reports which have reached IFOR indicate that, unable to endure the increasing restrictions and intrusions, monks and nuns had been leaving religious centres in rising numbers. Many monks left the A-Kyong Jonang Monastery in Pema (Baima) County of Golok Prefecture in Qinghai Province after the Chinese authorities banned its nine-day annual religious festival which had been due to start on January 18th, 2012. The monasteries of Drubde and Rachen have reportedly become completely deserted. The Driru, Pekar, Choeling, Tagmo, and Drongna monasteries and the Jana nunnery in Driru County of Nagchu Prefecture of Tibet Autonomous Region have also been affected.

Recommendations

Through the Human Rights Council, IFOR calls upon China:

- to allow Tibetan people full enjoyment of the rights guaranteed in China’s Constitution including religious freedom, freedom of expression and assembly;
- to allow international media, foreign diplomats and UN independent experts unfettered access to all Tibetan populated regions;
- to withdraw military personnel from the Ngaba, Kardze and Chamdo regions and from individual monasteries;
- to end “patriotic re-education” in monasteries and allow monks and nuns freely to practice their Buddhist philosophy;
- to provide information on the fate and whereabouts of all those arrested for allegedly taking part in protests;
- to resume dialogue with His Holiness the Dalai Lama or his envoys to find mutually agreeable solutions to the longstanding political problems of the region;
- to grant unconditional release to all prisoners held on political charges.