



བོད་ཀྱི་དོན་གཙོ་ཁང་།

THE TIBET BUREAU, GENEVA

**Alternative Report on Situation of Tibetan Women in Tibet
to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
for the Committee's consideration of ninth periodic report of China at its 85th session**

March 29, 2023

Submitted by,

**The Tibet Bureau Geneva
Place de la Navigation 10,
1201 Geneva, Switzerland**

Tel.+41 22 738 79 40: rep.ch@tibet.net; info@tibetoffice.ch

Introduction

1. This submission is made by the Tibet Bureau in Geneva for consideration of review of ninth periodic review of China scheduled for the Eight-fifth session of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).
2. The submission gives an overview of the situation of Tibetan Women in Tibet; identified key areas of concerns and systematic discrimination faced by Tibetan women under the government of People's Republic of China.
3. Violations of fundamental rights of Tibetan people by the People's Republic of China are pervasive. Tibetan women are disproportionately impacted by oppressive and discriminatory practices of China in Tibet.

Impact of COVID-19: Violations of Rights and Discrimination Against Tibetans

4. COVID-19 has been misused by the government of China as a tool to further “suppress” and “restrict” any forms of expressions and movements of Tibetans in Tibet. The failed and mismanagement of so-called “Zero-COVID” policy in Tibet has doubled-up the sense of insecurity, fear, rise in mental health issues and loss of lives.
5. Despite knowing the reprisals for voicing against mismanagement of “Zero-COVID” policy, poorly equipped quarantine quarters and medical services, Tibetans took risk to appear on various social media platforms and pleaded to the relevant authorities to provide hygienic food and healthcare to those locked in mass quarantine camps regardless of whether they were COVID positive or not. Lhasa officials acknowledged the mishandling of the situation and offered a public apology only to retaliate by arbitrary arrests and detention of those Tibetans who raised concerns about the situation online on social media¹.
6. The draconian “Zero COVID” policy along with poorly equipped medical services has pushed Tibetans to commit suicide. In just three days between 23 and 25 September 2022 in Tibetan capital city of Lhasa, five Tibetans committed suicide².

¹ “China’s Mismanaged Zero-Covid Policy Endangers Tibetan Lives in Tibet: Kashag’s Press Statement”, Tibet.net, available at: <https://tibet.net/chinas-mismanaged-zero-covid-policy-endangers-tibetan-lives-in-tibet/>

² “China’s zero-Covid policy pushes five Tibetans to commit suicide in three days”, read at: <https://tchrd.org/chinas-zero-covid-policy-pushes-five-tibetans-to-commit-suicide-in-three-days/>

Discrimination and Disproportionate participation of Women in government higher positions:

7. The leadership positions in the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region and in other Tibetan areas are all male-oriented positions, where women are significantly underrepresented. Additionally, being Tibetan origin by birth is often a source of apprehension labelling “not trustworthy” for holding higher government positions. Tibetan women are doubly discriminated against and barred in aspiring for higher government positions. Tibet Autonomous Region’s governor, Party secretary and chairman of TAR’s People’s congress are all male³, and no Tibetan woman has ever been named for a higher government position in the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region.

Gender based Violence and Discrimination

8. Gender bias against women remains widespread in Tibet. Tibetan nuns are forced to wear nonreligious clothing to avoid harassment. Often, taxi drivers outside of Tibetan areas refused to drive for them, hotels refused to provide lodging, and Han Chinese landlords refused to rent rooms for Tibetans. Such deep rooted societal discriminatory practices make Tibetan women more vulnerable and sidelined from undertaking independent social and economic activities.
9. Since the beginning of 2017, China began wide scale demolitions of two largest Tibetan Buddhist learning centers; Larung Gar and Yachen Gar, situated in Serthar (Ch:Seda) county in Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. Thousands of Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns were expelled from the learning centers and forced them to undergo “political reeducation” sessions in the internment camps.
10. Tibetan nuns expelled from the centers are detained in internment camps. They were forced to disrobe, wear military uniforms and sing patriotic songs praising the Chinese Communist Party. Detained nuns were subjected to sexual violence⁴. Testimony of

³ Tibet Autonomous Region sees no top-level leadership changes. Available at <https://savetibet.org/tibet-autonomous-region-sees-no-top-level-leadership-changes/>

⁴ Navigating the experiences of detained Tibetan Nuns of Yachen Gar in Tibet. Available at <https://tibetpolicy.net/navigating-the-experiences-of-detained-tibetan-nuns-of-yachen-gar-in-tibet/>

Tibetan monks who have witnessed the internment camp revealed how gender-based violence and discrimination are rampant in the internment camp. For instance, nuns were forced to pay for the military uniforms they had to wear in the internment camp, whereas monks did not need to pay for the military uniforms distributed in the internment camps.

11. Due to harassment and systematic repression against the religious practices, there are several known cases of suicide committed by Tibetan nuns. For instance, Tsering Dolma, Rigzen Dolma, Semgha and several other unidentified Tibetan nuns from Yachen Gar committed suicide in protest against forced demolitions of their Buddhist learning centers and forced expulsions of nuns from the centers.
12. In November 2016, six UN special rapporteurs expressed concern at the destruction and demolitions of Tibetan Buddhist learning centers; Larung Gar and Yachen Gar, noting the violations of Tibetans fundamental rights to take part in religious and cultural life⁵.

State-led Interethnic Marriages in Tibet

13. China's relentless efforts to assimilate Tibetan culture and identity through different social policies are of serious concern. In particular, the propagation and policies enforcing interethnic marriages between Han Chinese and Tibetans, in the name of "unity" and "harmony", severely curtailed personal freedoms, including choice of marriage partner. Tibet Autonomous Region then Party Secretary Chen Quanguo, who was later moved to Xinjiang, called upon all key officials in Tibet to act as "matchmakers"⁶. In addition to restrictions against cultural and religious life of Tibetan women, the imposition of marriage partners not only undermined the existence of a free Tibetan culture and way of life, but made Tibetan women more vulnerable to forced marriage.

⁵ <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=22816>

⁶ China promotes mixed marriages in Tibet as way to achieve 'unity', available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/china-promotes-mixed-marriages-in-tibet-as-way-to-achieve-unity/2014/08/16/94409ca6-238e-11e4-86ca-6f03cbd15c1a_story.html

Harassment and Sexual Abuses in colonial style boarding schools in Tibet

14. Nearly one million Tibetan children are forcibly separated from their families and forcibly placed into Chinese colonial style boarding schools in an effort to assimilate Tibetan children culturally, religiously and linguistically into the dominant Han Chinese culture. Tibetan parents who refuse to send their children to state-run boarding school faced a systemic discrimination, and are deprived of or cut off their access to avail government support system such as health care, the right to register in any school and the right to receive national identity card, which are essential for taking part in any kind of activity such as banking, internal travel permission, driving licenses and other.
15. Testimonies of Tibetan children have revealed rampant cases of rape, sexual harassment, beatings, bullying and theft in the state-run colonial style boarding schools⁷.
16. A Tibetan girl placed in colonial style boarding school in Badzong County, Tsolho Prefecture, Amdo (Ch: Tongde County, Hainan Prefecture, Qinghai) shared her experience of constant fear and abuse by Chinese teachers in the colonial style boarding school. She said “Random men climbed into the girls’ dormitory at night...Many times, it was just random men and they were not even from school. It was not uncommon that a Chinese male teacher barged into the girls’ room, and raped or sexually assaulted the school girls. Day or night, we were not safe, constantly in fear of something happening to us”⁸.
17. Tibetan girls were often called by Chinese teachers in their chamber and sexually harassed. When the girls did not comply, they were slapped and kicked⁹. As a means to escape from such an abusive environment, many cases of substance abuse and suicide among children, especially girls, have been reported¹⁰.

⁷ Separated from their families, Hidden from the World: China’s vast system of colonial boarding schools inside Tibet. Report by Tibet Action Institute. Available at <https://s7712.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/ColonialBoardingSchoolReport2021.pdf>

⁸ Separated from their families, Hidden from the World: China’s vast system of colonial boarding schools inside Tibet. Report by Tibet Action Institute. Available at <https://s7712.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/ColonialBoardingSchoolReport2021.pdf>

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid page-44

18. In February 2023, three UN Special Rapporteurs expressed concern over separation of over 1 million Tibetan children from families and assimilating Tibetan culture at colonial style boarding schools¹¹. Similarly, four UN Special Rapporteurs transmitted a joint communication to China Ref: AL CHN 6/2022, dated 11 November 2022, expressing serious concern over the forced separation of over 1 million Tibetan children from families¹².

Persecution of Tibetan Women Rights Defenders

19. Tibetan women rights defenders, including those that promote gender equality and equal participation in the political sphere, are suppressed systematically. For instance, a prominent Tibetan women rights defender and a doctor by profession, YC, is currently serving 15 years of imprisonment. She was wrongly accused of “espionage” by the Lhasa People’s Intermediate Court in November 2008. Since then, repeated appeals by her children to meet her have been categorically rejected by the Chinese authorities. Her failing health condition in prison is of serious concern.

20. GK, sister of imprisoned Tibetan entrepreneur DT, was tortured and detained by Chinese authorities on 20 March 2023¹³, for her campaigns against the unjust life sentencing of her brother, who is currently serving life imprisonment in Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) Prison No 1. Her brother was sentenced for life under fabricated charges of loan fraud in 2010. Since then, she has been campaigning for the release of her brother, subject to multiple arrests and torture by the Chinese authorities.

Compulsory Iris Scan and Mass DNA sample collections Targeting Tibetans

21. The government of People’s Republic of China is carrying out a mass Iris scan and DNA collection of Tibetans. Tibetan women and girls, against their will, are forced to give their biological data. China claims the mass collection of biological data-Iris scan

¹¹ China: UN experts alarmed by separation of 1 million Tibetan children from families and forced assimilation at residential schools. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/02/china-un-experts-alarmed-separation-1-million-tibetan-children-families-and>

¹² <https://tibet.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/SP-on-boarding-School.pdf>

¹³ Sister of imprisoned Tibetan businessman detained and beaten overnight. <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/businessman-sister-03222023172254.html>

and DNA-are used to fight against crime, locate missing persons and ensure social stability.

22. Human Rights Watch has reported DNA samples of Tibetans ranging from children as young as five years old to elderly people up to 65 years old have been collected by China under the guise of a mass health program.¹⁴ Additionally, research findings from Toronto-based Citizen Lab revealed between 920,000 to 1.2 million DNA samples have already been collected in so called Tibet Autonomous Region over the past six years, accounting for almost one-fourth to one-third of the total population.¹⁵
23. Racial profiling and biometric surveillance targeting Tibetans has further placed Tibetan women and girls vulnerable to discrimination, sexual abuses, harassment, coercive suppression and invasion of privacy and safety.

Restrictions of Movement: Denial of Passports for Tibetans in Tibet

24. The discriminatory practices and process in issuing passports by the government of China has made Tibetans virtually impossible to obtain passports. Chinese regulations issued in 2012 mandated all Tibetans in the so called Tibet Autonomous Region to surrender their old passports, even when their validity has not expired, apparently to be replaced by the electronic version. But in numerous cases, the passports were not replaced¹⁶.
25. Under the two track processing of applications for passports, all Tibetan areas are placed second/slow track processing, subjected to extremely long delays, often lasting for years before passports are issued, or passport applications are routinely rejected for no valid reasons¹⁷.
26. A prominent Tibetan woman writer and blogger Tsering Woeser was unable to collect various International award, including the U.S State Department's high-profile "Women of Courage" award in 2013-because her application for a passport was

¹⁴ "China: New Evidence of Mass DNA Collection in Tibet", *Human Rights Watch*, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/09/05/china-new-evidence-mass-dna-collection-tibet>

¹⁵ "Mass DNA Collection in the Tibet Autonomous Region from 2016–2022" <https://citizenlab.ca/2022/09/mass-dna-collection-in-the-tibet-autonomous-region/>

¹⁶ One Passport, Two Systems: China's Restriction on Foreign Travel by Tibetans and Others" available at https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/tibet0715_4up_0.pdf

¹⁷ *ibid*

denied¹⁸. Similarly, a group of Tibetan students, including students from the Girls' School, mostly from Tibetan nomadic families received a scholarship for study in Japan and the U.S. However, only few were allowed to leave Japan, but passports were denied to most of the remaining students.¹⁹

Removal and Displacement of Tibetan Nomads from Ancestral Land

27. For centuries, Tibetan nomads and herders have lived successfully with their herds using their centuries-old local knowledge and by keeping a pastoral lifestyle. However, under different policies and name tags such as “ecological migrants” or “comfortable housing projects”, Tibetan nomads are forcibly removed from their ancestors' land²⁰.
28. Tibetan people have no say in or a voice against the involuntary relocation without prior consent, mining activities and hydropower projects that are displacing them from their ancestral lands. The worst-affected Tibetans are mostly illiterate, women and live under a climate of fear. The few nomads who raise their voice, even on environmental grounds, are persecuted.
29. The displacement of Tibetan nomads without adequate planning, free and prior informed consent of Tibetan nomads not only undermines the inherent skills of nomads and restricts their mobility, but raises serious concerns about the long-term socio-economic situation of the displaced Tibetan nomadic community.

Crackdown on operation of International NGOs

30. China adopted a new “management” law on International NGOs in China in 2017²¹. The law stipulates any NGOs wishing to operate in China and other regions under its control must register with public security officials, and refrain from any political, social and religious activities that damage “ethnic unity”.
31. Prior to the NGO “management” law, the operations of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Tibet were heavily monitored and restricted. Only few International NGOs who

¹⁸ Denied passport by China, Tibetan author can't receive US prize for courage. <https://globalnews.ca/news/405774/denied-passport-by-china-tibetan-author-cant-receive-us-prize-for-courage/>

¹⁹ Tibetan Students Denied Permission to Travel for Overseas Study. <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/travel-10042013153826.html>

²⁰ Mass Rehousing and Relocation Programs in Tibet in Tibetan Areas of China, report by Human Rights Watch <https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/06/27/they-say-we-should-be-grateful/mass-rehousing-and-relocation-programs-tibetan>

²¹ Official monitoring of NGOs in China. <https://www.dw.com/en/official-monitoring-of-ngos-in-china/a-36971196>

have access to Tibet, and support social and economic life Tibetans are also expelled, leaving Tibet virtually under iron curtain.

32. Irrespective of legitimate work of independent NGOs, the law gives power to the Chinese authorities to stifle civil society space and tolerate state sanctioned activities to serve the interest of the Party and government.

Tibet Bureau Recommends the Committee Urge government of People's Republic of China:

- 1- Ensure equal rights and respect to the fundamental rights of Tibetans without any discrimination;
- 2- Encourage, Empower and Ensure equal participation of Tibetan Women in leadership and government higher position;
- 3- Take necessary step to ensure full and unrestricted enjoyment of cultural and religious rights of Tibetan women and nuns, including unhindered right to protect their own cultural and religious heritage and sites, to study, profess and practice Tibetan culture, language and religion without interference and any form of discrimination;
- 4- Ensure respect for the liberty of individuals and parents to choose their children schools, support the concluding observation of CESCR issued in February 2023, noting concern over forced assimilation of Tibetan culture by forcibly separating Tibetan children from parents, and recommends to abolish residential boarding school system imposed on Tibetan children;
- 5- Release all detained Tibetan rights defenders, including Women rights defenders, who are imprisoned for merely standing up for their fundamental rights;
- 6- Immediately stop racial profiling and biometric surveillance through compulsory Iris and Mass DNA sample collection of Tibetans, including Tibetan women and girls.

-END-