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Briefing Paper on Forced Closure of Renowned Jigme Gyaltsen Nationalities Vocational High School

Background: Jigme Gyaltsen Nationalities Vocational School was founded in August 1994 by Ragya Jigme Gyaltsen with the full approval and support of the Machen County People's Government and the Golog People's Government. Since its inception with 86 students primarily from inner Qinghai, the school has experienced significant growth. The institution expanded to accommodate over 1,000 students by 2021, mainly from Tibetan areas, including Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu, as well as Inner Mongolia. School construction was primarily intended to promote Tibetan culture and education, as described by the school's founder. It was evident from the past that Tibetan schools lacked enough Tibetan teachers, and their languages of instruction were Mandarin Chinese. Tragically, over the past few years, these educational policies have only become more repressive and restrictive.

In addition to Tibetan culture, the school also offers specialized classes in Tibetan language, English language, computer science, engineering, medicine, video and physical education. Since 1994, at least 2,259 graduate students have completed their studies, joined universities, workforce in the tertiary sector or become entrepreneurs.

Key Message: The Central Tibetan Administration is deeply concerned by the Chinese authorities' systematic violation of the right to education, which guarantees the establishment and maintenance of private schools. A number of international covenants enshrine this right, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, both of which have been ratified by the PRC.

The closure of the Tibetan Vocational High School, run by the Snow Land Academy of Sciences, follows similar closures of many Tibetan private and monastic schools in recent years by the PRC government with the primary aim to stop Tibetan students from having space and opportunity to learn Tibetan language and culture in schools. It is part of China's broader national strategy outlined in policy documents including National Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan and 13th Five-Year Development Plan for National Language Works, which aims to establish Chinese as the primary language of instruction in "minority regions" by the end of 2020.

As of 8 July 2021, the highly regarded Sengdruk Taktse Middle School Darlag County in Golog was forcibly closed down without providing any official reasons, while offering advice to students to enroll in government-affiliated schools. School closure was described by a former staff member as a significant loss to all because the school with its dedicated teachers had produced students who were well-versed in Tibetan cultural education and who were well-rounded individuals who had made a lasting impact on society.

The Qinghai provincial government, for instance, was forced in the past to suspend the introduction of education reform plans as they faced significant resistance from the local Tibetan population indicating deep-seated concerns among Tibetans about the erosion of their language and identity. Despite that, the closure of private Tibetan schools, such as the Jigme Gyaltsen Nationalities

Jul 23, 2024

Vocational School, affirms a renewed push to move forward with the implementation of these planned policies to enforce Chinese-medium instruction in state-run schools. These actions reflect a concerted effort to complete the policy objectives outlined in the national and provincial education reform plans.

Current Situation: The government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) has forcibly ordered the closure of the award-winning Jigme Gyaltzen Nationalities Vocational High School in Golog on 12 July 2024. As reported by reliable sources, the Chinese provincial government of Qinghai covered up the true reasons for the school's closure by stating that the search and interrogation were conducted to determine if there were any monks or nuns under 18 and threatened severe punishment if they were found.

While Jigme Gyaltzen said in his post that the school was closed on the government's instructions, and students and teachers would be able to attend government-run schools in the Golog area, reliable sources explained that several lawsuits and pressures from the Golog area's Communist Party Secretary and other officials have been conspiring to close this school for many years. There was a gloomy atmosphere at the school's last assembly held on 8 July with many government officials attending alongside the staff and students. It was a difficult goodbye, as students could be seen hanging their heads low and weeping in the videos.

The Pure Native Language Association, which was founded by a group of students, was also sued and taken to court in 2018 for using elements from the Tibetan national flag in their logo. Jigme Gyaltzen has been wrongly accused of accepting bribes while serving as chairman of the Snow Land Pastoral Association and the Qinghai-Tibet Trade Association. A 28 June 2024 article reported that Jigme Gyaltzen was found not guilty of any crimes against the school. His membership on the Tibetan Nationalities Council was also suspended.

Forced Admission into Chinese Government-run School: The only other option for Tibetan students in the area is to attend one of the government-run schools or residential schools. As apparent from the multiple reports from human rights organizations as well as international organizations including the United Nations, these Chinese government-run schools are notoriously known for their implementation of China's policy of acculturation and assimilation of the Tibetan culture, language and religion where Tibetan children lives away from their families and are deprived of the opportunity and the space to learn and acquaint themselves with Tibetan identity. Many of these children suffer emotional and psychological trauma from forced separation from their families and incessant political indoctrination sessions, as well as horrific experiences of sexual abuse, racial discrimination and poor living conditions in these boarding schools.

Recommendation: We urge the governments and international organizations to call China to,

- Immediately halt the closing of private Tibetan schools, teaching high quality Tibetan education, without the consent of the local population;

Jul 23, 2024

- To allow Tibetans to learn, use and develop Tibetan as their official language as guaranteed in the Chinese Constitution and Law on Regional National Autonomy and restore Tibetan as the medium of instruction in the offices across Tibet and Tibetan classes in schools, higher educational and vocational training centers;
- Immediately abolish coerced residential school systems imposed on Tibetan children and ensure that persons belonging to minorities can fully enjoy their cultural rights and use their own language;
- Ensure that children in all regions, including Tibetan children, are guaranteed the right to use their language in every aspect of their schooling;
- Amend its so-called bilingual education policy, which marginalizes the Tibetan language and uproots the younger generation of Tibetans from their culture and religion;
- Resume dialogue with the envoy/s of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to resolve the Sino-Tibetan conflict through the Middle-Way Approach without preconditions.