



Monthly Report
Tibet
January 2021



Aim

This report aims at raising awareness towards the minority groups of Tibet that are undergoing various human rights violations. It covers a few major events that occurred in 2020 and in January 2021. Global Human Rights Defence calls upon the national and international bodies for a constructive policy change in Tibet. Light needs to be shed on the ongoing violations towards these minority groups.



Region:	Tibet
Population:	6.5 Million (6,500,000)
Capital:	Lhasa
Largest city:	Nagqu
Major languages:	Tibetan. Other languages such as Chinese and Hindi are also implemented in schools.
Religion:	Tibetan Buddhism (followed by 70% of the population), with a minority of Tibetan Muslims and Christians.
Ethnicities:	Most are genetically from the East Asian ethnicity.
Life expectancy at birth:	70.60 years in 2019



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Tibet

The Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), is a province-level entity of the People's Republic of China (PRC). It was formally established in 1965, after the People's Liberation Army defeated the local army and forced Tibetan representatives to accept China's sovereignty and the region's incorporation into the People's Republic. The 14th Dalai Lama escaped from Tibet and set up the Government of Tibet in Exile in Dharamshala, India. Some areas formerly belonging to the Tibet Area became the Tibetan Autonomous Region, while some others were incorporated into the neighbouring Chinese provinces.

Human rights violations against minorities in Tibet

As highlighted during the 43rd Human Rights Council's session in March, the human rights situation in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) and in other Tibetan areas has undergone a dramatic deterioration in 2020. Mass detention, torture as well as massive infringements of civic, political and religious rights are common in several parts of China, including Tibet.¹ Chinese authorities continue to restrict freedom of religion or belief, freedom of assembly and of speech, and to deny land grabs and forced displacements in Tibet.² The 13th Five-Year Plan (2015-2020) contained measures for the implementation of a campaign to “sinicize” Tibet, disguising them as ways to boost economic development.³ Emblematic is the Chinese treatment of Tibetan Buddhism, which is seen as a highly sensitive political and security concern.

Therefore, freedom of belief is harshly restricted, and Tibetan Buddhists face high levels of religious persecution. In May, regulations for the promotion of “model areas for national unity and progress” came into force, representing a milestone for the further assimilation of Tibetan areas with China. According to the provisions included in the new

1. Central Tibetan Administration (2020, March 11). UN Member States raise Tibet at the 43rd UN Human Rights Council. <https://tibet.net/un-member-states-raise-tibet-at-the-43rd-un-human-rights-council/>

2. Human Rights Watch, 2021. China: Events of 2020. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/china-and-tibet#>

3. International Campaign for Tibet (2020, November 3). How China's 13th Five Year Plan impacted its Tibet policy. <https://savetibet.org/how-chinas-13th-five-year-plan-impacted-its-tibet-policy/>

regulations, national unity shall be promoted, among other things, in schools through strengthened ideological, political and patriotic education to ensure the loyalty of the next generations.⁴ Surveillance and intimidation have been intensified throughout the year to prevent public protests and silence dissent. Tens of Tibetans have been arrested for expressing peaceful opinions, engaging in legitimate activities or professing their faith to the Dalai Lama.⁵

Religion

Religion has historically played a key role in Tibetan identity and politics, and today it remains one of the most distinctive aspects of Tibetans' lives. The vast majority of Tibetans practice Tibetan Buddhism and hold a profound reverence for the Dalai Lama. However, religion appears to be not only a matter of culture, but also a political and security concern. Article 36 of the Chinese Constitution states that citizens enjoy “freedom of religious belief.”⁶ It also bans discrimination based on religion and forbids state organs, public organizations or individuals from compelling citizens to believe in any particular faith. Nevertheless, the Constitution limits protection for religious practice to “normal religious activities,”⁷ without further specifying what is considered to be normal, and prohibits religious activities that impair public order. China has ratified all the main international treaties and conventions regarding rights to religious, cultural and social self-determination, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Convention

4. International Campaign for Tibet (2020, February 12). New “ethnic unity” regulations violate Tibetans’ human rights: ICT briefing.<https://savetibet.org/new-regulations-on-ethnic-unity-officially-depart-from-preferential-ethnic-policies-threaten-tibetan-culture-and-violate-international-human-rights-norms/>

5. Human Rights Watch (2020, May 14). China: Tibet anti-crime campaign silences dissent.<https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/14/china-tibet-anti-crime-campaign-silences-dissent>

6. Chinese Constitution, Art. 36

7. Ibid.

8. UN General Assembly (1948, December 10). Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art. 18

9. Ibid., Art. 2

10. Ibid., Art. 29

on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), and the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance Based on Religion or Belief. The UDHR stipulates that all people have the right to manifest their religion “either alone or in community with others and in public or in private,”⁹ to be free from discrimination based on religion, and to be free to exercise religious beliefs without unnecessary government regulations.¹⁰ The ICCPR adds that minorities have the right to profess and practice their own religion in community with the other members of their group, without any limitations or exceptions.

In spite of this, freedom of religion is harshly restricted and Tibetan Buddhists face high levels of religious persecution. In the TAR and in other Tibetan areas there have been frequent reports of forced disappearance, arrests, prolonged detention, physical abuse, and torture.

Political oppression

As historically known, the political oppression of the Tibetan Autonomous Region continues to show signs of growth. As with other areas of under Chinese Republic, constant control along with the often forceful implementation of rules occurs (such as language, education and tight general propaganda). Strict implementation of these political laws and rules has not stopped Tibetans from protesting and “resisting the occupation and the destruction of their way of life.”



Palden Gyatso holding Tibetan flag with handcuffed hands to demonstrate the inhumane treatment by China in Tibet. Photo credits: tibet.net

Political Prisoners

The capturing and torturing of political and human rights defenders are ongoing issues in Tibet. These individuals are often captured, tortured and detained without any legal reasonings. It is also common for the families of these political prisoners to not know the location of their loved ones.

A review on important cases of 2020

The case of Tenzin Nyima

Tenzin Nyima was a young monk from the Dza Wonpo monastery, in the Sichuan province. The Chinese authorities initially detained him in November 2019 after he and other young monks held a peaceful protest distributing leaflets and calling for Tibetan independence. According to Tibet Watch, the protest was a response to the Chinese “poverty alleviation” policy, which expropriated thousands of Tibetans of their lands and forced them to relocate to different regions. Nyima was released in May 2020, but then apprehended again on August 11, allegedly for sharing information about the arrest and detention online, in particular with contacts in India.



Tenzin Nyima, Photo credit: Freetibet.org

13. Human Rights Watch. (2021, January 22). China: Tibetan monk dies from beating in custody. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/01/21/china-tibetan-monk-dies-beating-custody>
14. Free Tibet (2021, January 22). 19-year-old Tibetan monk Tenzin Nyima dies from injuries after police detention <https://www.freetibet.org/news-media/na/19-year-old-tibetan-monk-tenzin-nyima-dies-injuries-after-police-detention>

On October 9, Tenzin Nyima was admitted to a hospital in the provincial capital: he had lost consciousness and was suffering from serious injuries and an acute respiratory infection. ¹³ He was later discharged from the hospital on the grounds that his injuries were beyond treatment. Despite his comatose state, the young monk was issued with a court summons and demanded to appear before a court to face charges of “inciting separatism” on November 10. ¹⁴ Tenzin Nyima died soon after his family brought him back home, in January 2021.

The other monks that took part in the peaceful protests back in 2019 were tried behind closed doors between November and December 2020. Three of them were sentenced to four years each after being found guilty of inciting separatism. Another young monk was given three years in prison and Tsultrim, a minor aged 15 at the time of the protest, was sentenced to one year in prison, both on the same charges of inciting separatism. As stressed by Sophie Richardson, China director at Human Rights Watch, “Chinese authorities have once again turned arbitrary detention into a death sentence,” ¹⁶ like in the case of the lama Tenzin Delek Rinpoche, who died in custody in 2015.¹⁷

Ibid.

16. Human Rights Watch. (2021, January 22). China: Tibetan monk dies from beating in custody. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/01/21/china-tibetan-monk-dies-beating-custody>

17. Human Rights Watch. (2015, July 17). Dispatches: death of a Tibetan monk. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/07/17/dispatches-death-tibetan-monk>

18. Free Tibet (2020, April 29). Tibetan political prisoner dies of injuries from severe beating. <https://www.freetibet.org/news-media/na/tibetan-political-prisoner-dies-injuries-severe-beating>

19. Radio Free Asia (2020, April 24). Tibetan Monk Dies After Living Two Years With Torture Injuries Sustained in Custody. <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/gendun-sherab-04242020150923.html>

The case of Gendun Sherab

Gendun Sherab was a monk from the Rongpo Rabten Monastery in Sog County located in the Tibet Autonomous Region. Gendun Sherab passed away on the April 18, 2020 from the multiple injuries he obtained in prison. His arrest was carried out in 2017 and it was recorded that during these years in prison “Gendun was reportedly brutally beaten which led to a severe and life-threatening injury.”¹⁸ Sources state that after his release from prison (which occurred after three months) he struggled with his injuries. He sought medical attention but was denied medication from health facilities in Lhasa due to the fact that he was blacklisted as a political prisoner. This drove him to return to Sog County to seek traditional Tibetan medicine which did not help with the pain and could not save his life.

He was detained for having shared a message from the Dalai Lama on his WeChat. As has been demonstrated in the last centuries, anything related to the Dalai Lama faces severe restrictions and consequences implemented by the Chinese Communist Party. The specifications of his arrest were discovered by various sources as having direct link to the sharing of a document containing “a recognition letter from His Holiness the Dalai Lama regarding the reincarnation of Choegon Rinpoche from Sera Je Lhopa Khantsen.”¹⁹



The location of where Gendun Sherab was captured and where he sought to find medical attention during his last years of life. Source: freetibet.org

20. “ Monks forced to learn the Seventh Central Tibet Work Forum” (Free Tibet, 7 October 2020) < <https://freetibet.org/news-media/na/monks-forced-learn-seventh-central-tibet-work-forum>>

21. “ Chinese government official called for stricter policing of religious activities” (Free Tibet, 4 December 2020) < <https://www.freetibet.org/news-media/na/chinese-government-official-called-stricter-policing-religious-activities>>



A picture of Lhamo before her attack. Source: freetibet.org

The case of Lhamo

A Tibetan woman died at a hospital in central Tibet due to the beatings and torture carried out by police during custody. The family was asked to come to the hospital to identify her and found her heavily bruised and unable to speak.

Lhamo was a herder and 36-year-old mother of three from Driru County in Nagchu, which is governed as part of the Tibet Autonomous Region.²⁰ She was detained on charges that are related to sending money to family members or other Tibetans in India. Contact between Tibetans in Tibet and others outside the region is highlighted as “endangering national security” (even though this is not a crime under law).²¹

She was in good health before she was taken into custody. Police brutality on political prisoners follows a common trend in Tibet, along with the detention of individuals without committing any lawful crimes.

Torture, abuse and deaths in detention are rather common in China, and target extensively people belonging to minorities. As outlined in UN standards, cases of death in custody must be subject to “prompt, impartial and effective investigations into the circumstances and causes.”²² In June 2020, a collective statement from UN human rights experts²³ highlighted the need for independent investigations into a wide range of human rights violations committed by the Chinese Government. Among other things, the experts expressed concern over the repression of the population, especially religious and ethnic minorities in Xinjiang and Tibet. As emphasized by Sophie Richardson, China director at Human Rights Watch, “urgent, grim cases like the imprisonment of the young Tibetans have prompted UN experts to call for a mechanism to monitor and report on grave abuses by Chinese authorities. (...) A failure to hold accountable those responsible for Tenzin Nyima's death enables further appalling violations.”²⁴

22. UN General Assembly (2016, January 8). Nelson Mandela Rules, rule 71. https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/GA-RESOLUTION/E_ebook.pdf

23. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26006>

24. Human Rights Watch. (2021, January 22). China: Tibetan monk dies from beating in custody. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/01/21/china-tibetan-monk-dies-beating-custody>

Human Rights events 2021

A case of self-immolation

The Chinese control over Tibetan culture and practices has generated widespread resentment among both monastic and laypeople in Tibet. The most dramatic feature of Tibetan resistance that has appeared in recent years is represented by self-immolations. According to the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT), since 2009, 156 Tibetans have self-immolated in Tibet and China, while 10 other self-immolations by Tibetans occurred in exile.²⁵

This was until mid-January 2021. Indeed, the 157th self-immolation in Tibet came to light on January 12, 2021, after being censored by CCP officials for more than five years. That was the case of a young Tibetan called Shurmo who, according to the Central Tibetan Administration,²⁶ died after setting himself on fire on September 17, 2015. He was protesting against the repressive policies carried out by the Chinese administration in Tibet since 2014, and in particular those regarding restrictions on freedom of religion and of speech.²⁷

Due to the tight control over Tibetans' phone and online communications, information regarding protests, expressions of dissent and subsequent arrests and detentions is often delayed in China, and sometimes never reaches the outside world. This is especially true for self-immolations, as Shurmo's case reveals.



Police marching the streets of Tibet.
Photo Credit: Freetibet.org

25. International Campaign for Tibet (2021, January 13). Self-immolation fact sheet <https://savetibet.org/tibetan-self-immolations/>

26. Central Tibetan Administration (2021, January 12). 2015 Tibetan self-immolation protest news surfaces more than 5 years later [Updated]. <https://tibet.net/2015-tibetan-self-immolation-protest-news-surfaces-more-than-5-years-later/>

Government clampdown arrests



Police marching the streets of Tibet. Photo Credit: Freetibet.org

Thirty Tibetans were arrested in pro-independence protest in late November and early December 2019. These Tibetans were from the village of Dza Wonpo (eastern Tibet). And were detained as part of a Government clampdown on peaceful demonstrations.

Along with these arrests the police also occupied the streets to implement the clampdown, parading with weapons and live ammunition. The Tibetans arrested were accused of having social media contact with the outside world as well as keeping pictures of the Dalai Lama. Tibet Watch states that “some monks in the village were also forced to do 15 days of political re-education, as part of the crackdown.”²⁸ These Tibetans now have their phones checked and have been ordered to go the police station for interviews. They are still being monitored to this day.

27. Free Tibet (2021, January 18). Tibetan self-immolation protest revealed after five years of censorship. <https://www.freetibet.org/news-media/na/tibetan-self-immolation-protest-revealed-after-five-years-censorship>

28. Free Tibet (2020, January 7th). Authorities arrest over 30 Tibetans in government clampdown. <https://www.freetibet.org/news-media/na/authorities-arrest-over-30-tibetans-government-clampdown>

Right to teach the local language

The Chinese authorities have declared that the use of spoken and written languages among ethnic ministates is now unconstitutional. This seems to be an effort by the Chinese Communist Party to assimilate minority groups, including Tibetans, into a single Chinese identity.

The director of the Legal Affairs Committee of the National People's Congress, Shen Chungyao,²⁹ openly said that schools in minority areas should not teach their own languages. She states that if this is done then it is a violation of the “the country's major reform directions” and “the provisions of the higher-level law.”³⁰ This is not the first time that this unethical turn of events has occurred. It is stated that on May 2019 “an order was



Tibetan Children in a classroom. Photo credit: Free tibet.org

29. Free Tibet (2021, February 1), Teaching Tibetan language in Tibetan schools declared 'unconstitutional' <https://freetibet.org/news-media/na/teaching-tibetan-language-declared-unconstitutional>

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

given requiring all schools from the first-grade to the middle level and at county and township level to stop teaching subjects in Tibetan.”³¹ The reason behind this was given by local authorities as providing “more academic opportunities for the students.”³² This would cause the opposite reactions since such policies would have a negative effect on the Tibetan culture and knowledge.



Protests against China's human rights violations on International Human Rights Day. Photo credit: Tibet.net

Concluding Remarks

The international community needs to give larger attention to the events that are occurring in Tibet. There are countless human rights violations that are carried out in the region without the appropriate media coverage.

Global Human Rights Defence condemns these practices and asks the international community to give support to the Tibetan people in any way, shape or form. It is paramount to shed light on what is happening in Tibet.



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References

This monthly report mentions some of the Human Rights violations that have happened in the Tibet in 2020 and in the first month of 2021. Due to the fact that social media and news channels are limited in Tibet, some of the violations mentioned above may have occurred in the earlier years and only been reported recently.

Global Human Rights Defence team used various references to highlight these events. Some news outlets were used and highlighted more than others, therefore GHRD would like to show gratitude to the following sources:

FreeTibet (freetibet.org)

At the forefront in sharing news about Tibet. Working closely with Tibet Watch, they obtain the latest information about what occurs in and around Tibet.

International Campaign for Tibet (savetibet.org)

They advocate for the rights of the Tibetan people and implement strategies to solve certain human rights crises happening in the region.

Human Rights Watch (hrw.org)

Investigation and reporting of the abuse of human rights around the world. They highlight their campaign as: investigate, expose and change.