



# HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN TIBET REPORT

**OCTOBER 2021**



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## Aim of the report

This report aims to raise awareness and bring attention to the human rights violations that occur in Tibet consistently. This report provides a brief introduction on the region itself and subsequently goes into the human rights violations occurring against minorities in Tibet. After this general overview, the report presents three selected cases of human rights violations that occurred in October 2021.

## Tibet

Tibet is a highly disputed region located between the mountainous borders of China, India, Nepal and Bhutan. In 1950, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) invaded the Tibetan region and seized control by force (Richardson, 2020). In 1959, Tibetans formed an uprising against the Chinese imposition over their land, which was crushed with brutal violence (Richardson, 2020). A deal was made with Tibetan representatives, stipulating the acceptance of the Chinese presence and the annexation of the region to the People's Republic of China (Richardson, 2020).

With the arrival of the Chinese came the exile of the 14th Dalai Lama, who is the religious leader of Tibet. In 1959, the spiritual leader left for Dharamshala, India, which became the location of the Tibetan government-in-exile (Richardson, 2020). Dharamshala alone is estimated to host 10,000 Tibetans while another estimated 160,000 Tibetans live abroad (Baba, 2021).

### Map of Tibet



Map of Tibet. Source: BBC, 2019.

## Information on Tibet

Land mass	1,221,600 km <sup>2</sup>
Population (2010)	3 million
Capital	Lhasa (alt. 3650 meters)
Largest ethnic groups	Tibetan, Han, Hui, Monba, Lhoba, Naxi, Nu, Drung
Major language	Tibetan
Most practiced religion	Tibetan Buddhism

Source: Richardson et al., 2020.

## Human rights violations against minorities in Tibet

### Political oppression

Chinese authorities have been using “arbitrary detention” as a tool against those who speak and question their policies and rules in Tibet since its invasion. In recent years, this situation has significantly worsened. October 2021 was no different. A few examples of this are the fact that a 34-year-old monk named Lobsang Choephel from the Kirti monastery and his whereabouts and physical conditions still remain unknown (CTA, 2021). Additionally, a Tibetan writer who focused on activist work against Chinese policy was arrested two years ago on an ambiguous charge - he has recently been sentenced to four years imprisonment (Radio Free Asia, 2021).

This month saw a rise in political oppression of Tibet, not only through the aforementioned augmented restrictive policies and acts by Chinese authorities, but also from the growing support of external actors in Chinese affairs in Tibet (ET Bureau, 2021; WION, 2021). China has strongly expressed its intention of continuing operations in Tibet uninterrupted by external actors, with this month showing an even tighter grasp on the region. Against international expectations, China has promoted a new Communist Party Leader of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), Wang Junzheng, who was previously sanctioned by international actors for his participation in human rights violations in Xinjiang (WION, 2021). Thus, China is demonstrating the complete rejection of human rights concerns of the international community. The 48th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, and statements at the United Nations Third Committee both demonstrated China's growing support across the globe regarding its involvement in Tibet (ET Bureau, 2021). This could serve as a metaphorical green light for China's continued involvement in Tibet, with worrying consequences on the Tibetan population.

### Environmental human rights violations

The on-going 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow represented an opportunity to raise environmental issues concerning China's policies and activities affecting the Tibetan territory and its rural communities. The Chinese government's systematic exploitation of natural resources is contributing to the endangerment of the Tibetan ecosystem (The Hans India, 2021). This month, the issue has been brought to light with particular attention: the Tibetan Centre of Human Rights and Democracy blamed China for using Tibetan lands and eco-payments for their own profit. This point was raised during the COP26 Summit by the Tibetan delegation, which exposed China's climate action plan as detrimental for Tibetan rural households and nomads' access to safe water and decent livelihoods (Lekhden, 2021). Therefore, the focus of this situation should not only be geared towards the preservation of Tibetan cultural identity, heritage and the condition of political prisoners, but also to the increasing environmental degradation exacerbated by China's activities.

## Human rights events of October 2021



Source: Tibet.Net, 2021.

### **Kirti Monastery Monk, Lobsang Choephel, detained by Chinese authorities**

A 34-year-old monk named Lobsang Choephel, from the Kirti monastery of Nagba county, has been detained by Chinese authorities. - His current whereabouts and physical condition remain unknown. In his youth, he joined the monastery and worked as one of the staff members of the tech department (CTA, 2021). He has also served as one of the official photographers of the monastery, having received several awards for his photography skills, particularly on natural sceneries. He regularly published his work online under the pseudonym Rewai Dawoe. Prior to his most recent detention, Chinese authorities had also arrested him at Nagba twice, in 2008 and 2011 (CTA, 2021). It is reported that Chinese authorities have also detained many other monks at Kirti monastery, whose details and names are still unknown, in the Sichuan province earlier this month (CTA, 2021).

## Tibetan writer has been sentenced to four year imprisonment for criticizing Chinese rule



Source: Radio Free Asia, 2021.

Lobsang Lhundup, a Tibetan author, has been recently sentenced to four years imprisonment by a Chinese court; he was arrested two years ago on an ambiguous charge (Radio Free Asia, 2021). However, there is no confirmation on behalf of the Chinese authorities as to when the sentence was announced or his present location (Radio Free Asia, 2021). At the age of 11, Lobsang Lhundup became a monk and continued his studies at Sichuan's Larung Gar Tibetan Buddhist Academy, from which a large number of nuns and monks were forced out by Chinese authorities (Radio Free Asia, 2021). In his late 20s, he taught Buddhism at the Drepung and Sera monasteries, in Tibet's regional capital Lhasa, and traveled widely in Tibet thereafter. Most importantly, by using the pen name Dhi Lhaden, he published books questioning the policy and rule of Beijing in Tibet, especially after region-wide protests in 2008 against Chinese rules and policies. It is reported that his sentence was given on this ground, and for subsequently "creating disorder among the public" (Radio Free Asia, 2021). He was taken into custody in 2019 and was held for two years without any definite charge until this year (Radio Free Asia, 2021).

## Sanctioned senior official promoted to Communist Party Leader of the Tibet Autonomous Territory



Source: Reuters, 2018.

Until October 2021, Wang Junzheng was the Deputy Secretary of the Communist Party of China Committee of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region and the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (WION, 2021). During this time, Junzheng was sanctioned by the United States, the European Union and Canada for his participation in alleged human rights violations in the Xinjiang region in western China. In October, Junzheng was promoted to Communist Party Leader of the Tibet Autonomous Territory (WION, 2021). This move by Beijing shows the complete rejection of the West's reaction to its actions in Xinjiang, as well as its praise of officials such as Junzheng operating in regions with significant ethnic minority populations (WION, 2021). This is, naturally, troubling for the future of the Tibetan region. His appointment to this post will be carefully watched by worldwide human rights groups, especially concerning the well-being of Tibetans and the New Delhi border tensions.

## Key South Asian nations support China's human rights approaches



Source: Zhang Jun, China's permanent representative to the UN. Source: Xinhua from Zhang, 2021.

China has gained support from key South Asian countries as they endorsed a joint statement regarding China's human rights approach in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong (ET Bureau, 2021). The statement gained the support of 62 nations and was brought forward by Cuba at the United Nations Third Committee, which deals with humanitarian, social and cultural issues (ET Bureau, 2021). This was particularly worrying for India, as they saw their neighbors Sri Lanka and Nepal joining Pakistan and Myanmar to support China on this matter. The statement emphasized that issues in Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong were China's internal affairs, not be interfered with by external forces, and that the United Nations should respect the path for States to independently lead the path for human rights development aligned with national conditions (ET Bureau, 2021). The 62 signatory nations show a major increase in support as a few years ago, China could only manage to gain support from 40 countries mostly dependent on it for commercial and economic reasons.

## Environmental Human Rights Violations



Source: Yogendra Singh, 2021, Unsplash.

In light of the approaching 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow, and during the UN biodiversity summit, the Tibetan Centre of Human Rights and Democracy published a new report accusing China of being responsible for accelerating the climate deterioration of the Tibetan Plateau. The report blames China for using Tibetan lands to mitigate the country's own carbon footprints and climate impact. China has done this by falsely proclaiming vast watersheds to be national parks, therefore counterbalancing the country's increasing carbon emissions. However, this has not resulted in eco-compensation for Tibetan rural communities, who provide these ecosystem services. Instead, they are forcibly dislocated and removed from their lands (The Hans India, 2021). China's controversial approach to eco-compensation is therefore casting human rights and development concerns. (The Hans India, 2021).

## COP26 Summit: the Tibetan delegation denounces the serious existential threat posed by Chinese environmental policies



Tibetan Delegates at the UN COP26 Conference in Glasgow. Source: Central Tibetan Administration, 2021.

During the on-going UN COP26 Conference in Glasgow, the five young delegates representing Tibet have spoken about the increasing deterioration of the environment in Tibetan territory. The effects of climate change are becoming a significant threat for the Tibetan Plateau and its rural communities, and the Chinese government's activities in these areas are intensifying the already delicate situation. The Tibetan delegation is therefore denouncing China's exploitation of Tibetan natural resources, which also have a detrimental impact on natives' access to safe water and decent livelihoods (Lekhden, 2021). China's environmental policies and Tibetans' human rights are closely linked - the latter is dependent on China's actions. As expressed by Students for a Free Tibet<sup>1</sup>, "racist and oppressive policies have created an existential threat to both the lifestyle and the fragile ecosystem in Tibet" (Free Tibet, November 3, 2021). The Tibet delegation stressed this point by recognising that China's history of occupation plays a role in the deterioration of their environment, and this must be acknowledged by the international community as a whole (Central Tibetan Administration, 2021).

1. Free Tibet Organisation, <https://freetibet.org>.

## Concluding remarks

The month of October 2021 was characterised by increased forms of political oppression exerted through a rise of restrictive policies from the Chinese government, as well as an increased support of Chinese authority over Tibet from third countries. This period has also witnessed the arbitrary detention and charge on ambiguous grounds of Tibetan monks and an activist author.

Political oppression and arbitrary detention were accompanied by a rise of attention to environmental issues. The on-going COP26 in Glasgow was a timely occasion to bring the issues of the Chinese government's environmental policies and activities on Tibetan territory to light on a global scale and denounce its negative consequences on rural communities and nomads' human rights. The controversial impact of China's climate change action plan on Tibetans was brought up during the Summit by the Tibetan delegation, with the intention of putting Tibet's environmental issues as a top priority in the international community's agenda.

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