

# **Tibet 2024 Human Rights Report**

## **Executive Summary**

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in Tibet during the year.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: disappearances; torture or cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment or punishment; arbitrary arrest or detention; transnational repression against individuals located in another country; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including censorship; and restrictions of religious freedom.

The government did not take credible steps to identify and punish officials who committed human rights abuses.

## **Section 1. Life**

### **a. Extrajudicial Killings**

Unlike in previous years, there were no known reports or credible allegations the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings during the year.

## **b. Coercion in Population Control**

See section 1.b., Coercion in Population Control, in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2024* for China.

## **Section 2. Liberty**

### **a. Freedom of the Press**

Constitutional provisions for freedom of expression were not respected.

Tibetans could not criticize the government or advocate policies differing from those of the government without fear of punishment. This included discussion of many matters related to Tibetan Buddhism, including the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama, where deviation from Chinese Communist Party (CCP) ideology was explicitly banned by law. Those who openly displayed Buddhist flags and symbols faced arbitrary and sometimes harsh restrictions, in particular where authorities conflated their religious significance with political advocacy. Possession or display of the Tibetan flag was illegal. According to reports in recent years, security officials often canceled WeChat accounts carrying “sensitive information,” such as discussions regarding Tibetan-language education, and interrogated the account owners.

In June, Free Tibet reported the executive of Chigdril County, Golok

Prefecture, and the county's United Front Work Department carried out a 10-day political education campaign at a local monastery for the approximately 100 monks in residence after a Tibetan monk at the monastery was detained for a WeChat post criticizing a county law. County officials detained the monk without a warrant in May on charges of separatism and held him incommunicado. The nongovernmental organization (NGO) stated the government's Monastery Management Committee also instructed the monks to refrain from any social media, written, or other communication critical of government views on ethnic unity.

In October, Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported Tibetan environmental activist Tsogon Tsering from Tsaruma Village, Ngaba Prefecture, Sichuan Province was sentenced to eight months in prison for "disturbing social order" and "provoking trouble and picking quarrels" after he posted a five-minute video online accusing Anhui Xianhe Construction Engineering Company of illegally extracting sand and gravel from the banks of the Tsaruma River starting in May 2023. Sources told RFA Tsering was being held in Kyunchu County Prison while authorities continued their investigation.

## **Physical Attacks, Imprisonment, and Pressure**

Authorities continued to harass writers, journalists, and media outlets seen as deviating in public or private from official government policy in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) and other Tibetan regions. Harassment

included surveillance, repeated police interrogations, denial of social services, denial of employment, and travel limitations, among other means. Sometimes harassment escalated to violence.

## **Censorship by Governments, Military, Intelligence, or Police Forces, Criminal Groups, or Armed Extremist or Rebel Groups**

Authorities tightly controlled journalists who worked for the domestic press and hired and fired them based on assessments of their political reliability. Chinese Communist Party propaganda authorities oversaw journalist accreditation in the TAR and required journalists working there to display “loyalty to the party and motherland.”

The TAR government required media organizations to cooperate with authorities on ethnic unity propaganda work and criminalized speech or spreading information “damaging to ethnic unity.”

The government completely controlled schools’ curricula, textbooks, and other course materials as well as the publication of historically or politically sensitive academic books. Authorities in Tibetan areas regularly banned the sale and distribution of music they deemed to have sensitive political content. To print in the Tibetan language, private printing businesses needed special government approval, which was often difficult to obtain.

Authorities also banned Tibetans from possessing physical and digital images of the Dalai Lama and prohibited posting images of the Dalai Lama as

well as religious symbols on social media. In July, RFA reported local authorities intensified social media surveillance of Tibetans, even stopping travelers between Lhasa and Shigatse, the TAR's second-largest city, to question whether the travelers were in possession of the Dalai Lama's photographs or had been in contact with anyone, particularly outside of Tibet, regarding the Dalai Lama's birthday. Sources told RFA authorities issued a blanket ban prohibiting Tibetans from communicating with anyone outside Tibet regarding the Dalai Lama's birthday.

Foreign journalists could visit the TAR only after obtaining a special travel permit from the government, which was rarely granted. When authorities permitted journalists to travel to the TAR, the government severely limited the scope of reporting by monitoring and controlling their movements and intimidating and preventing Tibetans from interacting with them. According to numerous journalists, physical and electronic surveillance of foreign journalists was tighter than in Han-populated areas of the country.

Authorities prohibited domestic journalists from reporting on repression in Tibetan areas. Authorities promptly censored the postings of bloggers and users of WeChat who did so, and the authors sometimes faced punishment. Authorities banned some writers from publishing; prohibited them from receiving services and benefits, such as government jobs, bank loans, and passports; and denied them membership in formal organizations.

The TAR Internet and Information Office maintained tight control of social

media platforms.

Authorities continued to disrupt RFA Tibetan- and Mandarin-language services in Tibetan areas, as well as those of the Voice of Tibet, an independent radio station based in Norway.

In addition to maintaining strict censorship of print and online content in Tibetan areas, authorities sought to censor the expression of views or distribution of information related to Tibet outside mainland China.

## **b. Worker Rights**

### **Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining**

See section 2.b., Worker Rights, in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2024* for China.

### **Forced or Compulsory Labor**

A July report by the Human Rights Foundation on the Tibetan mining sector warned of a high risk of forced labor, under the guise of the Chinese government’s “rural surplus labor transfer” and “poverty alleviation through labor transfer” initiatives.

For additional information on forced labor, see the Department of State’s annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* for China at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

## **Acceptable Work Conditions**

### **Wage and Hour Laws**

See section 2.b., Worker Rights, in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2024* for China.

### **Occupational Safety and Health**

See section 2.b., Worker Rights, in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2024* for China.

### **Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement**

See section 2.b., Worker Rights, in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2024* for China.

## **c. Disappearance and Abduction**

### **Disappearance**

There were reports of enforced disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities; the whereabouts of many persons detained by security officials were unknown.

On August 30, in commemoration of the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, the India-based NGO Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD) published a statement highlighting the

center's documentation of 63 cases of Tibetans who were forcibly disappeared in the last four years. The TCHRD found the total number of cases known to it to be relatively low, which highlighted "a disturbing trend of underreporting, which is often associated with fear of reprisals."

In April RFA reported authorities arrested Pema, a Buddhist monk from Kirti Monastery in Ngaba County, Sichuan Province, after he staged a solo protest, reportedly shouting against government policies while holding a portrait of the Dalai Lama. Authorities did not acknowledge his arrest or provide any information on his detention or whereabouts. Sources told RFA that, following Pema's arrest, authorities heightened restrictions around Kirti Monastery by deploying a large number of security forces.

The whereabouts of the 11th Panchen Lama chosen by the Dalai Lama, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the second-most prominent figure after the Dalai Lama in Tibetan Buddhism's Gelug school, remained unknown. Neither he nor his parents were seen since they disappeared in 1995, allegedly by or on behalf of Chinese authorities, when he was six.

## **Prolonged Detention without Charges**

The constitution and law prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention and provided for the right of persons to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court. The government did not observe these requirements.

According to criminal law, public security officers could detain persons for

up to 37 days without formally arresting or charging them. Further detention required approval of a formal arrest by the prosecutor's office; however, in cases pertaining to "national security, terrorism, and major bribery," the law permitted up to six months of incommunicado detention without formal arrest. When a suspect was formally arrested, public security authorities could detain the person for up to an additional seven months while the case was investigated. Incommunicado detention was a common practice.

The TCHRD reported that in September, Chinese authorities arbitrarily detained four Tibetans, including two monks from Kirti Monastery. The NGO further reported the group was detained incommunicado in Ngawa Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province, and that no information had been provided regarding their location or charges against them.

In October 2023, the Office of the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders and other UN experts made public a letter written to the Chinese government regarding concerns for the well-being of nine Tibetan environmental activists and human rights defenders arrested between 2013 and 2018: A-Nya Sengdra, Dorjee Daktal, Kelsang Choklang, Dhongye, Rinchen Namdol, Tsultrim Gonpo, Jangchup Ngodup, Sogru Abhu, and Namesy. The letter noted the government provided little to no information on the detentions, trials, or sentencing of the nine, having publicly released

only the sentences of three. Whether any of the individuals had access to legal counsel or medical care remained unclear. As of October, the government had not replied.

Security officials frequently violated the legal limits for pretrial detention, and pretrial detention for more than a year was common. Individuals detained for political or religious reasons were often held on national security charges, which allowed longer pretrial detention than under other charges. Authorities held many prisoners in extrajudicial detention centers without charge and never allowed them to appear in public court.

#### **d. Violations in Religious Freedom**

See the Department of State's annual *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

According to a May 2023 RFA report, government enforcement of a 2022 regulation providing authorities additional powers to restrict online content related to religion constituted an effective ban on any Tibetan writers or Buddhist monks offering religious content online. Restrictions on online religious content were used to silence and punish those sharing religious materials on social media. The measures prohibited unlicensed organizations from organizing religious activities on the internet and broadcasting or recording religious ceremonies “such as worshipping Buddha, burning incense, ordaining, [or] chanting...in the form of words,

pictures, audio, and video.”

Tibetans traveling in monastic attire were subjected to extra scrutiny by police at checkpoints, airports, and other transportation hubs.

### **e. Trafficking in Persons**

See the Department of State’s annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

## **Section 3. Security of the Person**

### **a. Torture and Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment**

Despite legal prohibitions, there were many credible reports government officials, including police and prison authorities, employed such practices in dealing with some detainees and prisoners. Information concerning detainees’ treatment generally did not emerge for years, making timely reporting on conditions difficult.

In November, *Tibet Times* reported Losel, a monk from Sera Thekchen Ling Monastery in Lhasa, died in prison as the result of beatings he suffered while in detention and the subsequent denial of medical care. He was reportedly arrested in May for “communicating with individuals outside of Tibet and gathering and sharing information from within the region.”

Reports from released prisoners indicated some developed permanent disabilities or were in extremely poor health because of the harsh treatment they endured in prison. Former prisoners also reported being isolated in small cells for months at a time and deprived of sleep, sunlight, and adequate food.

There were reports detained suspects and prisoners were subjected to a wide range of psychological abuses, including forced re-education and isolation. They were also subjected to forced labor.

Impunity for abuses of human rights was pervasive. There were no reports officials investigated or punished those responsible for unlawful killings and other abuses in previous years.

## **b. Protection of Children**

### **Child Labor**

See section 3.b., Child Labor, in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2024* for China.

### **Child Marriage**

See section 3.b., Child Marriage, in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2024* for China.

### **c. Protection to Refugees**

See section 3.c., Protection to Refugees, in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2024* for China.

### **d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement**

See section 3.d., Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement, in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2024* for China.

### **e. Instances of Transnational Repression**

Chinese authorities engaged in transnational repression against the approximately 150,000 Tibetans living outside the TAR and the Tibetan autonomous prefectures and counties, many as refugees in India and Nepal.

#### **Threats, Harassment, Surveillance, or Coercion**

The Tibetan overseas community was frequently subjected to harassment, monitoring, and cyberattacks believed to be carried out by the Chinese government. In April, the NGO Turquoise Roof released an extensive analysis of China's efforts to deploy targeted surveillance technology against diaspora communities, including the Central Tibetan Administration. In November, the *Record* and the Central Tibetan Administration reported a China-linked state hacker group had compromised websites of Tibetan digital news outlet *Tibet Post* and Gyudmed Tantric University.

A wide range of diaspora and civil society sources reported Chinese embassies and consulates frequently required ethnic Tibetans, including Tibetan-Americans, seeking consular services to provide detailed information on family members and personal connections in China. As this information was generally not requested of other travelers or citizens living abroad, many viewed it as an implied threat the Chinese government would punish relatives to retaliate for criticism of Beijing's policies.

The TCHRD concluded in July that, based on its analysis of testimony from 84 exiled Tibetans collected between June 2022 and November 2023, the Chinese government had escalated transnational repression efforts targeting the Tibetan diaspora during that period. The report identified the following tactics: Chinese authorities sought to inhibit or sever connections between Tibetans in exile and their relatives in Tibet; authorities used the personal information of exiled Tibetans to infiltrate and sabotage diaspora networks (including through disinformation campaigns) and as a basis for blackmail; and authorities used intimidation and threats against relatives in Tibet to coerce exiled Tibetans into renouncing their activism.

## **Efforts to Control Mobility**

Authorities strictly limited issuance of passports and foreign travel, and even when approving such travel, authorities routinely threatened consequences against family members remaining behind should the traveler speak out against the regime while abroad or fail to return. In many cases, public

security bureau officers continued to deny passport applications. In some cases, officials required family members to sign a guarantee that passport applicants would return from their travel. Numerous Tibetans in Gansu, Qinghai, and Sichuan Provinces reported waiting up to 10 years to receive a passport, often without explanation for the delay. Authorities sometimes confiscated and canceled valid passports, reportedly to prevent participation in religious events in India involving the Dalai Lama.

## **Bilateral Pressure**

There were credible reports China continued to put heavy pressure on Nepal to implement a border systems management agreement and a mutual legal assistance treaty, which could result in the return of Tibetan refugees to China, and to refuse to register or issue identity documents to Tibetan refugees. Nepal did not take additional steps to implement the agreements; however, it continued not to register Tibetans. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees estimated three-quarters of the approximately 12,000 Tibetan refugees in Nepal remained undocumented.

In February, RFA reported the Chinese government contacted Cambodian officials to pressure the Cambodian organizers of the Miss Global 2023 beauty pageant to bar Tenzin Paldon from participating because her sash read “Miss Tibet.” Paldon refused to add “China” to her sash and was forced to withdraw from the contest. In addition to wearing the “Miss Tibet” sash, she shouted “victory to Tibet” during a preliminary round.

