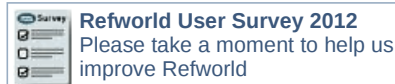


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State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2012 - China

The year 2011 revealed unmistakable signs of ferment and frustration in Chinese society. Unsettled by the pro-democracy Arab Spring uprisings and the country's scheduled leadership transition in October 2012, the government launched the largest crackdown on human rights lawyers, activists and critics in a decade. This resulted in tightened internet censorship, persecution of high-profile critics, and an increasing number of forced disappearances and arbitrary detentions.

During 2011, the Chinese government continued to limit religious practice to officially approved religious institutions. There was a continued crackdown on unregistered religious organizations, including underground Christian groups. In April, the government pressured a Beijing landlord to evict the Shouwang 'house church' with 1,000 congregants from its location in his restaurant. Consequently, services were held outdoors attracting police attention and resulting in the temporary detention of more than 100 of its members. Thousands of Falun Gong spiritual practitioners, members of a group targeted by the authorities, continued to face intimidation, harassment and arrest. The government continued to heavily restrict religious activities in the name of security in minority areas, particularly in Tibet and Xinjiang.

While ethnic minorities in China constitute only 8 per cent of the overall population, they inhabit large areas rich in natural resources, especially energy and minerals, in some of the most impoverished regions of the country. For example, Inner Mongolia has rich coal deposits; Xinjiang is known to have China's largest oil and gas reserves; Tibet has massive deposits of gold, copper and rare earths, as well as much of the country's water resources.

Over the past decade, these areas have been the target of the government's 'Go West' campaign. Ostensibly, the government's goal has been to reduce regional disparities and bring economic development to the western provinces and autonomous regions (Ningxia, Tibet, Inner Mongolia, Guangxi and Xinjiang); critics have defined the campaign as 'internal colonization', aimed at bringing large areas in minority regions under control so as to exploit their natural resources to support further development along the country's east coast.

During 2011, the Chinese government called for accelerated development in minority areas under its 12th Five-Year Plan (2011-15). Also in 2011, the US Congressional Executive Commission on China (CECC) reported that in ethnic minority autonomous regions the Chinese government continued to implement top-down development policies that have undercut the promotion of regional autonomy and limited the rights of minorities to maintain their unique cultures, languages and livelihoods, while bringing a degree of economic improvement. The government push on development also meant an intensification of the long-standing majority Han migration into minority areas. These new arrivals have disproportionately benefited from economic opportunities, which has caused resentment among ethnic minorities. Also, the environmental degradation that accompanies natural resource exploitation continues to exacerbate tensions.

Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region

The Chinese authorities have continued to implement a repressive security regime in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, since violent riots broke out in July 2009 – the worst ethnic conflict in recent Chinese history. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), the government has still not accounted for hundreds of people detained after the riots and continues to target human rights activists.

Tensions in the region have been exacerbated by increasingly tight controls over religious practice and use of minority languages. Government-led development projects have undermined the rights of Uighurs and other non-Han communities. Employment practices in both the private and public sectors have also continued to discriminate against Uighurs and other non-Han groups, who together comprise roughly 60 per cent of Xinjiang's population.

During the summer of 2011, the region was the scene of several violent incidents. In July, at least 18 people were killed when rioters, some armed with homemade explosives, attacked a police station in the city of Hotan. And on 30 and 31 July, at least 13 people were killed and 44 injured in two episodes in Kashgar, the state news agency Xinhua reported. Following these incidents, the authorities launched an anti-terrorism campaign in August, targeting illegal religious activity and implementing patriotic education campaigns.

In October, Xinhua reported that the government was considering new stricter anti-terrorism legislation, claiming that the country faced serious threats from Islamist groups. In December, police killed seven Uighurs accused of being terrorists in Pishan County, a Uighur-majority area near the Pakistan border. However, overseas Uighur groups said they doubted the official account of events.

Land seizures in the ancient Uighur city of Kashgar also stirred up resentment. Eighty per cent of traditional Uighur neighbourhoods in Kashgar were scheduled for demolition by the end of 2011, and many Uighurs have been forcibly evicted and relocated to make way for a new city centre, dominated by the Han population. Forced evictions have become a routine part of life in China amid rampant development. But rural land grab disputes hit new highs in 2011 and are spreading further into undeveloped regions of western China, according to an October report by Xinhua's magazine, *Outlook Weekly*.

Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region

Violence also broke out in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region in north-west China. On 30 December 2011, police clashed with ethnic Hui Muslims in Taoshan village. According to the Hong Kong-based Information Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, 50 people were injured and two people killed after authorities declared a newly refurbished mosque illegal and the police tried to demolish it.

Grassland policies

At a State Council meeting in April 2011, authorities called for 'more forceful policy measures' for 'speeding up development of pastoral areas, ensuring the state's ecological security, and promoting ethnic unity and border stability'. This strengthened ongoing grassland policies that impose grazing bans, and resettle herders, forcing them to give up their pastoralist lifestyle, which affects Mongols, Tibetans, Kazakhs and other minorities. Critics have questioned the effectiveness of such policies in meeting the declared goal of restoring degraded grassland, while affected communities report forced resettlement, inadequate compensation and loss of traditional livelihoods and culture.

Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region

During the year, rising ethnic tensions in the usually relatively calm Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region rattled the Chinese authorities. In May, a Mongolian herder protesting against the destruction of traditional grazing land was killed by a Han driver transporting coal in Uxin County. The incident sparked the worst demonstrations in two decades in Inner Mongolia. Protesters called for the government to respect herders' rights and condemned the exploitation of grasslands. While the government executed the truck driver responsible, the mining project that caused the protest continued.

Further protests broke out when another herder was killed by an oil truck in a similar incident in October. This prompted the government to tighten security and cut off internet and mobile-phone access to large parts of the region, according to the Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center (SMHRIC). Mongolian herders continue to complain that their traditional grazing lands have been ruined by mining, that widespread desertification is turning the grassland to dust, and that the government has forcibly relocated them into settled houses.

Tibetan autonomous areas

The situation in the Tibet Autonomous Region, and other Tibetan autonomous areas of Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu and Yunnan provinces grew increasingly tense throughout 2011. Since the brutal crackdown on protests that swept the plateau in 2008, Chinese security forces have maintained a heavy presence. Large numbers of Tibetans, including intellectuals, monks and farmers, have been imprisoned, and monasteries, seen by the Chinese government as the focus of dissent, have been subject to intensified controls and political pressure. Tibetans are increasingly economically marginalized, as development has brought an influx of majority Han Chinese into Tibetan regions; the newcomers dominate the job market, and local businesses as well as culture.

During the second half of the year, there was a wave of self-immolations mainly involving Buddhist monks and nuns across eastern Tibet. In March, a monk from the Kirti monastery in the Tibetan Ngaba region of Sichuan province set fire to himself in protest against Chinese rule and

© UNHCR the ongoing repression of Tibetan religious and cultural identity. In August, local authorities imposed heavy prison sentences on three Tibetan monks who had assisted him. Ten more Tibetan monks and one nun had self-immolated by mid-November, all expressing their desperation in the face of ongoing repression. By March 2012, a reported 30 Tibetans had set themselves on fire in Tibetan areas of China to protest against government policies.

The self-immolations have raised the level of tension and distress in Tibet to new heights. Security forces have used violence when raiding monasteries, searching for signs of allegiance to Tibet's exiled spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, and arbitrarily detaining monks. Demonstrations, vigils and expressions of moral support for protesters seen as martyrs by the wider population have been met with ever tighter security clampdown. The wave of self-immolations has caused the central authorities considerable embarrassment but has resulted in no change in their repressive policies.

The recent acceleration in natural resource development has led to increasing conflict and protests in the region. The completion of the Qinghai-Tibetan railway in 2005 and new highways is spurring an economic boom in Tibet, including hydropower and mining (see case study on page 162). For example, Tibetans protested against the Gyama mine project, controlled by Vancouver-based China Gold and located just upstream of Lhasa in 2010. The mining operation has reportedly dried up spring waters, poisoned drinking water, killed animals and destroyed flora and fauna in the region. Despite this, in August 2011, China Gold announced that it will proceed with a major expansion of the project.

Across Tibet, nomads are being systematically and often forcibly relocated into settled communities as part of a policy known as 'ecological migration'. For example, since 2005, 50,000 Tibetan nomads have been relocated from the Sanjiangyuan National Reserve in Qinghai province on the Tibetan Plateau into unfamiliar urban areas where there are few economic opportunities. Some experts have pointed out that the locations of the recent self-immolations correspond, 'with a few exceptions', to areas of intensive resettlement. Social problems – such as high levels of unemployment and crime – have quickly emerged in these areas. The government's ostensible goal is to preserve fragile ecosystems and to counteract the negative impact of over-grazing. But during 2011, the boundaries of the reserve have quietly been redrawn to allow for large-scale gold mining by Inter-Citic, a Canadian mining company, near the source of the Yellow River.

The government is ramping up its hydropower ambitions in a bid to meet renewable energy targets, resurrecting projects previously shelved for environmental reasons. The NGO International Rivers has reported that China has begun to build a series of dams in ethnic minority regions of south-west China, including the Jinsha (upper Yangtze), Lancang (Mekong) and the Nu (Salween) Rivers.

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