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Tibetan Nomads Resist Relocation, Are Stripped of Personal Documents

Updated at 10:20 a.m. EST on 2014-11-10

Authorities have confiscated the residency permits and other personal documents of a group of Tibetan nomads in northwestern China's Qinghai province who refused to move from their traditional grazing grounds to impoverished resettlement towns, according to Tibetan sources.

Requests that the documents be restored to their owners were later rebuffed by officials, who cited the nomads' "disobedience" of government policy and demanded payment of a large fine for the documents' return, sources said.

The issue arose at the end of October when officials in Yulshul (in Chinese, Yushu) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture insisted the nomads move to a resettlement town far from their homes, a Tibetan source in exile told RFA's Tibetan Service.

"Sometime around Oct. 24 or 25, a number of Tibetans led by Kalsang and Nyima of Dzamar village under Domda township in Tridu [Chenduo] county refused to move from their nomadic area to new towns being built as part of a Chinese resettlement project," the source said, citing local contacts.

"In response, the authorities took away their IDs, driving licenses, and residency permits as punishment for violating government orders and policy," the source said.

On Nov. 1, a delegation of 10 Tibetans from Dzamar village went to the Domda township center to ask that the documents be returned, but township officials refused their request, insisting instead on payment of a 10,000 yuan [U.S. \$1,633] fine.

"The township officials criticized the nomads' refusal to move as 'disobedience' and 'noncompliance with central government policy,'" the source said.

"However, the Tibetan representatives said they were unable to pay such a large sum of money."

'Very bad conditions'

Last year, nearly 200 nomads from the Domda area were moved to resettlement towns, but housing conditions there "were reportedly very bad," RFA's source said.

"The housing sites were also very remote and inaccessible, so many Tibetans sold their new houses for a nominal price of 1,500 to 2,000 yuan [U.S. \$245-327] and left," he said.

Tibetan nomads are now banned from grazing in, and being required to move from, "some of the best pasture land in all of the Tibetan Plateau, especially in the key prefectures of Yulshul and Golog [Guoluo]," Tibet environmental expert Gabriel Lafitte told RFA.

Chinese policy provides that resettled nomads be given vocational training and access to markets, said Lafitte, author of the recently released book *Spoiling Tibet: China and Resource Nationalism on the Roof of the World*.

"[However], in reality, there is very little vocational training, and resettled nomads have few opportunities to enter the modern economy," he said.

"Some make a living setting up a local shop selling basics to other resettlers. Some especially young adults find casual low-paid work on urban construction crews, road-building and repair gangs."

"But success stories are few," he said.

Reported by Pema Ngodup for RFA's Tibetan Service. Translated by Karma Dorjee. Written in English with additional reporting by Richard Finney.

CORRECTION: Text corrected to read " ... northwestern China's Qinghai province."

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