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COUNTRY REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS PRACTICES 2017 - CHINA (TIBET)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United States recognizes the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and Tibetan autonomous prefectures (TAPs) and counties in Sichuan, Qinghai, Yunnan, and Gansu Provinces to be a part of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) Central Committee oversees Tibet policies. As in other predominantly minority areas of the PRC, ethnic Chinese CCP members held the overwhelming majority of top party, government, police, and military positions in the TAR and other Tibetan areas. Ultimate authority rests with the 25-member Political Bureau (Politburo) of the CCP Central Committee and its seven-member Standing Committee in Beijing, neither of which has any Tibetan members.

Civilian authorities generally maintained effective control over the security forces.

The most significant human rights issues included: disappearances; torture by government authorities; arbitrary detentions, including political prisoners; and government curtailment of the freedoms of speech, religion, association, assembly, and movement.

The presence of the paramilitary People's Armed Police (PAP) and other security forces remained at high levels in many communities on the Tibetan Plateau, particularly in the TAR and certain parts of Tibetan areas in Sichuan Province. Repression was severe throughout the year but increased in the periods before and during politically and religiously sensitive anniversaries and events. Authorities detained individuals in Tibetan areas after they reportedly protested against government or business actions or expressed their support for the Dalai Lama. The government strictly controlled information about, and access to, the TAR and some key Tibetan areas outside the TAR. The Chinese government harassed or detained Tibetans as punishment for speaking to foreigners, attempting to provide information to persons abroad, or communicating information regarding protests or other expressions of discontent through cell phones, email, or the internet, and placed restrictions on their freedom of movement.

Disciplinary procedures were opaque, and there was no publicly available information to indicate that senior officials punished security personnel or other authorities for behavior defined under PRC laws and regulations as abuses of power and authority.

Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings

There were no reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings. There were no reports that officials investigated or punished those responsible for such killings that had previously taken place.

Disappearance

Authorities in Tibetan areas continued to detain Tibetans arbitrarily for indefinite periods.

The whereabouts of the 11th Panchen 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 have been seen since Chinese authorities took them away in 1995 when he was six years old.

Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

According to credible sources, police and prison authorities employed torture and degrading treatment in dealing with some detainees and prisoners. There were reports during the year that Chinese officials severely beat some Tibetans who were incarcerated or otherwise in custody. In the past, such beatings have led to death.

On January 25, Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported that in December 2016, police detained Khedrup, a Tibetan doctor from Machu (in Chinese: Maqu) county of Gannan TAP in Gansu Province. Police suspected that he sent photos and video clips of Tibetan Tashi Rabten's self-immolation to international media. The report noted that police interrogated, tortured, beat, and applied other forms of mistreatment to Khedrup during his detention, which lasted more than one month.

On March 22, *TibetanReview.net* reported that public security officials and local police severely beat and tortured approximately 10 relatives of Tibetan farmer Pema Gyaltsen (or Pegyal) of Nyagrong (Chinese: Xinlong) county, Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi) TAP, Sichuan Province after they inquired about Pegyal's conditions following his self-immolation on March 18. After beating them, police forced these relatives to stand the entire night, resulting in acute pain in their legs and spinal cords. Authorities released them only when officials of their townships provided letters vouching for their future good conduct.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison conditions were harsh and potentially life threatening due to physical abuse and inadequate sanitary conditions and medical care.

There were reports of recently released prisoners permanently disabled or in extremely poor health because of the harsh treatment they endured in prison (see Political Prisoners and Detainees subsection below). Former prisoners reported being isolated in small cells for months at a time and deprived of sleep, sunlight, and adequate food. According to individuals who completed their prison terms during the year, prisoners rarely received medical care except in cases of serious illness. There were many cases of detained and imprisoned persons being denied visitors. According to local contacts, authorities detained Thewo Kunchok Nyima, a well-known monk scholar of Drepung Monastery, in 2008 for acting as the "ring leader" and the main instigator of protests in Lhasa. Kunchok Nyima has reportedly been serving a 20-year sentence, but the government has not granted his family permission to visit him in prison. His whereabouts remained unknown.

Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

Arbitrary arrest and detention was a problem. Public security agencies are required by law to notify the relatives or employer of a detained person within 24 hours of their detention, but they often failed to do so when Tibetans and others were detained for political reasons. With a detention warrant, public security officers may legally detain persons throughout the PRC for up to 37 days without formally arresting or charging them. Following the 37-day period, public security officers must either formally arrest or release the detainee. Security officials frequently violated these requirements. It was unclear how many Tibetan detainees the authorities held under forms of detention not subject to judicial review.

According to the India-based *Tibet Post International*, in January Chinese security officers in Serta County, Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi) TAP of Sichuan Province arrested Sonam Tashi, a Tibetan man in his twenties, after he publicly advocated for freedom in Tibet and called for His Holiness the Dalai Lama's return to Tibet. Tashi's whereabouts and health conditions remained unknown following his arrest.

On March 21, *Phayul.com* reported that Dukpe, a Tibetan mother of two from Ngaba's Raru Township, was arrested for shouting slogans such as "Long live the Dalai Lama" and "Freedom in Tibet." Her whereabouts and health conditions remained unknown.

Denial of Fair Public Trial

Legal safeguards for detained or imprisoned Tibetans were inadequate in both design and implementation. Prisoners in China have the right to request a meeting with a government-appointed attorney, but many Tibetan defendants, particularly political defendants, did not have access to legal representation. In cases that authorities claimed involved "endangering state security" or "separatism," trials often were cursory and closed. Local sources noted that trials were predominantly conducted in Mandarin, with government interpreters providing language

services for Tibetan defendants who did not speak Mandarin. Court decisions, proclamations, and other judicial documents, however, were generally not published in Tibetan.

Trial Procedures

In its annual work report, the TAR High People's Court stated its top political tasks as firmly fighting against separatism, cracking down on the followers of "the 14th Dalai (Lama) clique," and maintaining social stability by, among other things, sentencing those who instigated protests, promoted separatism, and supported "foreign hostile forces." The report also stated the court prioritized "political direction," which included absolute loyalty to the core party leadership.

In May the TAR Justice Department announced its decision to hire Chinese judicial personnel from outside the TAR. Among the requirements for new employees are loyalty to the CCP leadership and a willingness to combat separatism in the region.

Security forces routinely subjected political prisoners and detainees known as "special criminal detainees" to "political re-education" sessions.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

An unknown number of Tibetans were detained, arrested, and sentenced because of their political or religious activity. Authorities held many prisoners in extrajudicial detention centers and never allowed them to appear in public court.

Based on information available from the political prisoner database of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, as of October 1, there were 507 Tibetan political prisoners known to be detained or imprisoned, most of them in Tibetan areas. Observers believed the actual number of Tibetan political prisoners and detainees to be much higher, but the lack of access to prisoners and prisons, as well as the dearth of reliable official statistics, made a precise determination difficult. An unknown number of persons continued to be held in detention centers rather than prisons. In the 143 cases for which there was available information on sentencing, sentences ranged from two years' to life imprisonment. Of the 143 persons, involved in those cases, 68 were monks, nuns, or Tibetan Buddhist reincarnate teachers.

Tibetan exiles and other observers believed Chinese authorities released Tibetan political prisoners in poor health to avoid deaths in custody. On May 1, authorities released Jampal, a Tibetan man from Machu County of the Tibetan area in Gansu Province, after he served eight years of his 13-year sentence for leading a protest in front of government offices in 2008. Many speculated that authorities granted him early release due to his poor physical condition. While in prison, he was reportedly tortured and suffered head and leg injuries, which negatively affected his ability to walk.

According to several local contacts, Jigme Gyatso, a monk of Labrang Monastery in Gansu Province, was released from prison in October 2016 due to poor health. He reportedly received permission to travel freely within China to receive medical treatment for the severe torture and beatings that he endured during his imprisonment.

Tibetan Self-Immolations

Five Tibetans are thought to have self-immolated during the year, including one Tibetan Buddhist monk and three laypersons. There have been 145 such immolations since 2009, with the number per year decreasing from 83 reports of self-immolations in 2012, to seven in 2015, and three in 2016. Local contacts reported the decline in reported self-immolations was due to tightened security by authorities, the collective punishment of self-immolators' relatives and associates, and the Dalai Lama's public plea to his followers to find other ways to protest Chinese government repression. Chinese officials in some Tibetan areas withheld public benefits from the family members of self-immolators and ordered friends and monastic personnel to refrain from participating in religious burial rites or mourning activities for self-immolators. According to an April 15 RFA report, security officials detained at least five Tibetans, three of whom were severely beaten, for possessing the mobile phone of Wangchuk Tseten, a Tibetan man who reportedly self-immolated in Nyagrong (Chinese: Xinlong) county, Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi) TAP, Sichuan Province on April 15.

Self-immolators reportedly viewed their acts as protests against the government's political and religious oppression. The Supreme People's Court, the Supreme People's Procuratorate, and the Ministry of Public

Security's joint 2012 Opinion on Handling Cases of Self-immolation in Tibetan Areas According to the Law criminalized various activities associated with self-immolation, including "organizing, plotting, inciting, compelling, luring, instigating, or helping others to commit self-immolation," each of which may be prosecuted as "intentional homicide."

Authorities in Gannan TAP in Gansu Province imposed restrictions on the family of Chagdor Kyab, a 16-year-old student who self-immolated on May 2 in the Bora Township to protest against "Beijing's rule in Tibetan areas." He called for Tibetan freedom and the return of the Dalai Lama to Tibet. Authorities prevented Chogdar's family from holding prayer services and blocked visits by relatives and friends. In June local contacts reported that authorities ordered Chogdar's family to receive "political education training" and threatened to discontinue the family's public benefits should they defy the orders.

Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

Since 2015 the TAR has strengthened the punishment of Communist Party members who follow the Dalai Lama, secretly harbor religious beliefs, make pilgrimages to India, or send their children to study with Tibetans in exile. Authorities continued to monitor private correspondence and search private homes and businesses for photographs of the Dalai Lama and other politically forbidden items. Police examined the cell phones of TAR residents to search for "reactionary music" from India and photographs of the Dalai Lama. Authorities also questioned and detained some individuals who disseminated writings and photographs over the internet.

Since November 2016 the TAR CCP has strictly implemented a real-name user identification system for landline telephones, mobile phones, and the internet. It has also launched attacks and specialized campaigns to counter and ferret out "Tibetan independence" and promote the proliferation of party media into every home to oppose those who support the Dalai Lama.

The "grid system" (also known as the "double-linked household system") continued. The grid system involves grouping households and establishments so that they can watch each other for societal issues and report transgressions to the government. While this allows for greater provision of social services to those who need them, it also allows for easier crackdowns on "extremists" and "splittists."

In August the Central Tibet Administration in India reported that Jampa Choegyal from Drakyab County, Chamdo Prefecture of the TAR, was arbitrarily detained, interrogated, and subjected to beatings for contact with his relative in India via his mobile phone.

According to reports, Gendun, a Tibetan man from Sershul County in the Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi) TAP of Sichuan Province was detained and severely beaten for storing photos of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the banned Tibetan national flag in his WeChat account.

Freedom of Expression, Including for the Press

Freedom of Expression: Tibetans who spoke to foreigners or foreign reporters, attempted to provide information to persons outside the country, or communicated information regarding protests or other expressions of discontent through cell phones, email, or the internet were subject to harassment or detention under "crimes of undermining social stability and inciting separatism." During the year authorities in the TAR and other Tibetan areas sought to strengthen control over electronic media and to punish individuals for the ill-defined crime of "creating and spreading of rumors."

Tashi Wangchuk continued to be held without trial after being charged in 2016 with "inciting separatism." If found guilty, he faces up to 15 years in prison.

Press and Media Freedom: Foreign journalists may visit the TAR only after obtaining a special travel permit from the government, and this permission was rarely granted. The Foreign Correspondents Club of China's annual report stated reporting from "Tibet proper remains off-limits to foreign journalists." This same report noted many foreign journalists were also told that reporting in Tibetan areas outside the TAR was "restricted or prohibited."

Authorities tightly controlled journalists who worked for the domestic press and could hire and fire them based on assessments of their political reliability. In May the TAR Press, Television, and Radio Bureau announced job vacancies with one of the listed job requirements to "resolutely implement the Party's line, principles, policies, and political stance, fight against separatism, and safeguard the motherland's unity and ethnic unity." CCP

propaganda authorities remained in charge of local journalist accreditation in the TAR and required journalists working in the TAR to display “loyalty to the Party and motherland.” The deputy head of the TAR Propaganda Department simultaneously holds a prominent position in the TAR Journalist Association, a state-controlled professional association to which local journalists must belong.

Violence and Harassment: Chinese authorities arrested and sentenced many Tibetan writers, intellectuals, and singers for “inciting separatism.” Numerous prominent Tibetan political writers, namely Jangtse Dokho, Kelsang Jinpa, Buddha, Tashi Rabten, Arik Dolma Kyab, and Gangkye Drupa Kyab, reported that security officers closely monitored them following their release from prison between 2013 and 2016. In addition, they were banned from publishing and were no longer able to receive public services and benefits such as public-service jobs, bank loans, passports, and membership in formal organizations.

Censorship or Content Restrictions: Domestic journalists were not allowed to report on repression in Tibetan areas. Authorities promptly censored the postings of bloggers who did so, and the authors sometimes faced punishment.

Since the establishment of the CCP’s Central Leading Small Group for Internet Security and Informatization in 2014, the TAR Party Committee Information Office has further tightened the control of a full range of social media platforms. According to multiple contacts, security officials often cancelled WeChat accounts carrying “sensitive information,” such as discussions about Tibetan language education, and interrogated the account owners. Many sources also reported it was almost impossible to register websites promoting Tibetan culture and language in the TAR.

The Chinese government continued to jam radio broadcasts of Voice of America and RFA’s Tibetan and Chinese-language services in some Tibetan areas as well as the Voice of Tibet, an independent radio station based in Norway.

According to multiple sources, authorities in Qinghai and Sichuan provinces confiscated or destroyed “illegal” satellite dishes in many Tibetan areas. In addition to maintaining strict censorship of print and online content in Tibetan areas, Chinese authorities sought to censor the expression of views or distribution of information related to Tibet in countries and regions outside of mainland China. In March Tashi Norbu, a Tibetan painter based in the Netherlands and whose work featured the Dalai Lama and previously was shown in an exhibit in Dharamsala, India, was forced to cancel a scheduled live-painting performance in Macau after authorities in Beijing threatened to arrest and deport him if he tried to enter a Chinese-administered region. According to Norbu, a gallery official told him a high-level Chinese military official stated that Norbu was blacklisted and forbidden entry into Macau. Norbu was advised to leave Hong Kong for his own safety.

Internet Freedom

As in the past year, authorities curtailed cell phone and internet service in the TAR and other Tibetan areas, sometimes for weeks or even months at a time, during periods of unrest and political sensitivity, such as the March anniversaries of the 1959 and 2008 protests, “Serf Emancipation Day,” and around the Dalai Lama’s birthday in July. In addition, local observers reported authorities disrupted internet service in areas where self-immolations occurred. They also claimed authorities threatened community members with sentences of up to 15 years for those who shared images, videos, and information of the self-immolations outside Tibetan areas. When internet service was restored, authorities closely monitored its usage. There were widespread reports of authorities searching cell phones they suspected of containing suspicious content. Many individuals in the TAR and other Tibetan areas reported receiving official warnings and being briefly detained and interrogated after using their cell phones to exchange what the government deemed to be sensitive information. In July the TAR Internet and Information Office received approval from the Chinese National Social Science Foundation to complete a key research project known as “Countermeasures to Internet-based Reactionary Infiltration by the Dalai Lama Clique.”

In 2016 the National People’s Congress Standing Committee passed a cybersecurity law that further strengthened the legal mechanisms available to security agencies to surveil and control content online. Some observers noted that provisions of the law, such as Article 12, disproportionately affected Tibetans and other ethnic minorities. Article 12 criminalizes using the internet to commit a wide range of ill-defined crimes of a political nature, such as “harming national security,” “damaging national unity,” “propagating extremism,” “inciting ethnic hatred,”

“disturbing social order,” and “harming the public interest.” The law also codifies the practice of large-scale internet network shutdowns in response to “major [public] security incidents,” which public security authorities in Tibetan areas have done for years without a clear basis in law. On March 8, the TAR reported that the newly established TAR branch of China’s National Cyberspace Administration has been actively engaging in a “Tibet-related cyberspace battle” both inside and outside of China.

Throughout the year authorities blocked users in China from accessing foreign-based, Tibet-related websites critical of official government policy in Tibetan areas. Well-organized computer hacking attacks originating from China harassed Tibet activists and organizations outside China.

Academic Freedom and Cultural Events

As in recent years, authorities in many Tibetan areas required professors and students at institutions of higher education to attend regular political education sessions, particularly during politically sensitive months, in an effort to prevent “separatist” political and religious activities on campus. Authorities frequently encouraged Tibetan academics to participate in government propaganda efforts, such as making public speeches supporting government policies. Academics who refused to cooperate with such efforts faced diminished prospects for promotion and research grants.

Academics in the PRC who publicly criticized CCP policies on Tibetan affairs faced official reprisal. The government controlled curricula, texts, and other course materials as well as the publication of historically or politically sensitive academic books. Authorities frequently denied Tibetan academics permission to travel overseas for conferences and academic or cultural exchanges. Authorities in Tibetan areas regularly banned the sale and distribution of music they deemed to have sensitive political content.

In May senior officials of the state-run TAR Academy of Social Science encouraged scholars to maintain “a correct political and academic direction” and held a conference to “improve scholars’ political ideology” and “fight against separatists” under the guidance of Xi Jinping.

Policies promoting planned urban economic growth, rapid infrastructure development, the influx of non-Tibetans to traditionally Tibetan areas, expansion of the domestic tourism industry, forced resettlement and the urbanization of nomads and farmers, and the weakening of Tibetan-language education in public schools and religious education in monasteries continued to disrupt traditional living patterns and customs and accelerate forced assimilation.

Tibetan and Mandarin Chinese are official languages in the TAR, and both languages appeared on some, but not all, public and commercial signs. Inside official buildings and businesses, including banks, post offices, and hospitals, signage in Tibetan was frequently lacking, and in many instances forms and documents were available only in Mandarin. Mandarin was used for most official communications and was the predominant language of instruction in public schools in many Tibetan areas. Private printing businesses in Chengdu needed special government approval to print in the Tibetan language, but it was often difficult to obtain approval.

A small number of public primary schools in the TAR continued to teach mathematics in the Tibetan language, but since June 2016, observers reported that TAR officials have replaced Tibetan language mathematics textbooks in all middle and high schools with Mandarin versions. Observers also reported that WeChat users in the TAR discussing the issue were subsequently visited by public security officers and punished for spreading rumors.

According to sources, there were previously 20 Tibetan language schools or workshops for local children operated by Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in Sichuan Province’s Kardze TAP. After the 2015 release of the Kardze TAP Relocation Regulation for Minors in Monasteries, authorities forced 16 of these schools to close and relocated their students to government-run schools.

The Kardze TAP has the highest illiteracy rate (above 30 percent) in Sichuan Province, compared with a national rate of 4 to 5 percent. Despite the illiteracy problem, in 2016 the central government ordered the destruction of much of Larung Gar, the largest Tibetan Buddhist education center and a focal point for promoting both Tibetan and Chinese literacy. The central government reportedly also ordered the destruction of Yachen Gar, another Tibetan Buddhist education center in Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi) Prefecture, where both Tibetan and Chinese are taught.

China's Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law states, "schools (classes and grades) and other institutions of education where most of the students come from minority nationalities shall, whenever possible, use textbooks in their own languages and use their languages as the media of instruction." Despite guarantees of cultural and linguistic rights, many primary, middle, high school, and college students had limited access to officially approved Tibetan language instruction and textbooks, particularly in the areas of modern education.

China's most prestigious universities provided no instruction in Tibetan or other ethnic minority languages, although classes teaching the Tibetan language were available at a small number of universities. "Nationalities" universities, established to serve ethnic minority students and ethnic Chinese students interested in ethnic minority subjects, offered Tibetan language instruction only in courses focused on the study of the Tibetan language or culture. Mandarin was used in courses for jobs that required technical skills and qualifications.

Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

Even in areas officially designated as "autonomous," Tibetans generally lacked the right to organize and play a meaningful role in the protection of their cultural heritage and unique natural environment. Tibetans often faced intimidation and arrest if they protested policies or practices they found objectionable. In 2015 authorities in Rebkong County in the Tibetan Region of Amdo, now administered under Qinghai Province, circulated a list of unlawful activities. The list included "illegal associations formed in the name of the Tibetan language, the environment, and education." As was the case in the previous year, sources in the area reported this list remained in force and that no new associations had been formed since the list was published.

In July local contacts reported that many monasteries and rural villages in Tibetan areas in Sichuan and Qinghai Provinces received official warnings not to organize gatherings, including the celebration of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's birthday. According to these contacts, many Tibetan students at various nationality universities were instructed not to organize gatherings and parties in March (Tibet Uprising Day) and July (His Holiness the Dalai Lama's birthday).

At the Sixth Tibet Work Forum in 2015, the CCP ordered a large-scale campaign to expel students and demolish living quarters at Larung Gar, the world's largest center for the study of Tibetan Buddhism. The expulsion and demolition campaign commenced in 2016. According to local contacts, authorities reduced the resident population to 5,000 and demolished more than 3,000 residences by August. Before the campaign began, the population at Larung Gar was estimated to be as large as 30,000. Since July 2016, authorities have banned foreign tourists from visiting the area. In August the government appointed a prefecture police chief to serve as president of Larung Gar.

Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/.

Freedom of Movement

Chinese law provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation; however, the government severely restricted travel and freedom of movement for Tibetans, particularly Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns.

In-country Movement: Freedom of movement for all Tibetans, but particularly for monks and nuns, remained severely restricted throughout the TAR as well as in other Tibetan areas. The PAP and local public security bureaus set up roadblocks and checkpoints on major roads, in cities, and on the outskirts of cities and monasteries, particularly around sensitive dates. Tibetans traveling in monastic attire were subject to extra scrutiny by police at roadside checkpoints and at airports.

Authorities sometimes banned Tibetans, particularly monks and nuns, from going outside the TAR and from traveling to the TAR without first obtaining special permission from multiple government offices. Many Tibetans reported encountering difficulties in obtaining the required permissions. This not only made it difficult for Tibetans to make pilgrimages to sacred religious sites in the TAR, but it also obstructed land-based travel to India through Nepal. Tibetans from outside the TAR who traveled to Lhasa also reported that authorities there required them to surrender their national identification cards and notify authorities of their plans in detail on a daily basis. These requirements were not applied to ethnic Chinese visitors to the TAR.

Even outside the TAR, many Tibetan monks and nuns reported it remained difficult to travel beyond their home monasteries for religious and traditional Tibetan education, with officials frequently denying permission for visiting monks to stay at a monastery for religious education. Implementation of this restriction was especially rigorous in the TAR, and it undermined the traditional Tibetan Buddhist practice of seeking advanced teachings from a select number of senior teachers based at major monasteries scattered across the Tibetan Plateau.

Foreign Travel: Many Tibetans continued to report difficulties in obtaining new or renewing existing passports. Sources reported that Tibetans and other minorities had to provide far more extensive documentation than other Chinese citizens when applying for a Chinese passport. For Tibetans, the passport application process could take years and frequently ended in rejection. Some Tibetans reported they were able to obtain passports only after paying substantial bribes. Tibetans continued to encounter significant obstacles in traveling to India for religious, educational, and other purposes.

In 2016 Chinese officials in the Tibetan Regions of Kham and Amdo under the administration of Qinghai, Sichuan, and Gansu Provinces visited the homes of Tibetan passport holders and confiscated their documents. Officials claimed they collected the passports in order to affix new seals on them, but Tibetans suspected the timing was intended to make it impossible for them to attend an important religious ceremony known as the Kalachakra, which the Dalai Lama conducted in India in January. Additional reports in 2016 indicated that travel agencies in China were told by local authorities to cancel trips to India and Nepal during this same period. The apparent travel ban also reportedly extended to ethnic Chinese travelers. Tibetans who had traveled to Nepal and planned to continue to India reported that Chinese officials visited their homes in Tibet and threatened their relatives if they did not return immediately. Sources reported that explicit punishments included placing family members on a blacklist, which could lead to the loss of a government job or difficulty in finding employment; expulsion of children from the public education system; and revocation of national identification cards, thereby preventing access to other social services, such as health care and government aid. As a result of these measures, approximately 7,000 Tibetans who were already in India legally for the 2017 Kalachakra missed the event as they had to return to the PRC or face severe repercussions. In September news reports speculated that in preparation for the 19th Party Congress meeting the government barred foreigners from entering Tibet borders between October 18 and October 28, and foreigners already travelling in the area were required to leave during those dates.

Tight border controls sharply limited the number of persons crossing the border into Nepal and India. From January to October, 41 Tibetan refugees transited Nepal through the Tibetan Reception Center, run by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Kathmandu, en route to permanent settlement in India. This was fewer than in previous years, with 120 refugees able to register at the center in 2016, 89 in 2015, and 80 in 2014.

The government restricted the movement of Tibetans in the period before and during sensitive anniversaries and events and increased controls over border areas at these times. In January there were reports that travel agents in Chengdu, Xining, and Kunming were forbidden to sell package overseas tours to Tibetans for the months of March and July, the periods around Tibet Uprising Day (March 10) and the Dalai Lama's birthday (July 6).

The government regulated travel by foreigners to the TAR, a restriction not applied to any other provincial-level entity in the PRC. In accordance with a 1989 regulation, foreign visitors had to obtain an official confirmation letter issued by the TAR government before entering the TAR. Most tourists obtained such letters by booking tours through officially registered travel agencies. In the TAR, a government-designated tour guide had to accompany foreign tourists at all times. It was rare for foreigners to obtain permission to enter the TAR by road. In what has become an annual practice, authorities banned many foreign tourists from the TAR in the period before and during the March anniversary of the 1959 Tibetan uprising. Foreign tourists sometimes also faced restrictions traveling to Tibetan areas outside the TAR.

Foreign officials were able to travel to the TAR only with the permission of the TAR Foreign Affairs Office and only on closely chaperoned trips arranged by that office. With the exception of a few highly controlled trips, authorities repeatedly denied requests for international journalists to visit the TAR and other Tibetan areas (see section on Freedom of Expression).

Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

According to the law, Tibetans and other Chinese citizens have the right to vote in some local elections. The Chinese government, however, severely restricted its citizens' ability to participate in any meaningful elections.

Since 2015 the TAR and many Tibetan areas have reinforced implementation of the Regulation for Village Committee Management, which stipulates that the primary condition for participating in any local election is the “willingness to resolutely fight against separatism;” in some cases, this condition is interpreted to require candidates to denounce the Dalai Lama. Several sources reported that newly appointed Communist Party cadres have replaced more than 90 percent of traditional village leaders in the TAR and in Tibetan areas outside the TAR over the last two years, despite the lack of village elections.

Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The law provides criminal penalties for corrupt acts by officials, but the government did not implement the law effectively in Tibetan areas, and officials often engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. There were numerous reports of government corruption in Tibetan areas during the year, and some low-ranked officials were punished.

Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

WOMEN

Rape and Domestic Violence: There was no confirmed information on the incidence of rape or domestic violence.

Coercion in Population Control: Population and birth planning policies permitted Tibetans and members of some other minority groups to have more children than Han Chinese. Estimates on maternal mortality and contraceptive prevalence are available at: www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/monitoring/maternal-mortality-2015/en/.

Discrimination: There were no formal restrictions on women’s participation in the political system, and women held many lower-level government positions. Nevertheless they were underrepresented at the provincial and prefectural levels of government.

Children

Many rural Tibetan areas have implemented China’s nationwide “centralized education” policy, which forced the closure of many village and monastic schools and the transfer of students, including elementary school students, to boarding schools in towns and cities. Reports indicated many of the boarding schools did not adequately care for and supervise their younger students. This policy also resulted in diminished acquisition of the Tibetan language and culture by removing Tibetan children from their homes and communities where the Tibetan language is used.

According to observers, by November the government had replaced the European founders and assumed management control of the Lhasa-based Braille without Borders preparatory school for blind students and its associated vocational farm. Observers speculated the change was part of China’s wider effort to crackdown on foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State’s annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Although the 2010 TAR census figures showed that Tibetans made up 90.5 percent of the TAR’s permanently registered population, official figures did not include a large number of long-, medium-, and short-term ethnic Chinese migrants, such as cadres, skilled and unskilled laborers, military and paramilitary troops, and their respective dependents. Tibetans continued to make up nearly 98 percent of those registered as permanent residents in rural areas, according to official census figures.

Migrants to the TAR and other parts of the Tibetan Plateau were overwhelmingly concentrated in urban areas. Government policies to subsidize economic development often benefited ethnic Chinese migrants more than Tibetans. In many predominantly Tibetan cities across the Tibetan Plateau, ethnic Chinese or Hui migrants owned and managed most of the small businesses, restaurants, and retail shops.

Observers continued to express concern that development projects and other central government policies disproportionately benefited non-Tibetans and resulted in a considerable influx of Han Chinese and Hui persons into the TAR and other Tibetan areas. Many major infrastructure projects across the Tibetan Plateau were engineered and implemented by large state-owned enterprises based in other provinces, and they were managed and staffed by professionals and low-wage temporary migrant workers from other provinces rather than by local residents.

Economic and social exclusion was a major source of discontent among a varied cross section of Tibetans. Some Tibetans continued to report discrimination in employment. Some Tibetans reported it was more difficult for Tibetans than ethnic Chinese to obtain permits and loans to open businesses, and that many Chinese, especially retired soldiers, were given incentives to move to Tibet. Restrictions on both local NGOs that received foreign funding and international NGOs that provided assistance to Tibetan communities increased during the year, resulting in a decrease of beneficial NGO programs in the TAR and other Tibetan areas.

The government continued its campaign to resettle Tibetan nomads into urban areas and newly created communities in rural areas across the TAR and other Tibetan areas. Improving housing conditions, health care, and education for Tibet's poorest persons were among the stated goals of resettlement, although there was a pattern of settling herders near townships and roads and away from monasteries, which were the traditional providers of community and social services. A requirement that herders bear a substantial part of the resettlement costs often forced resettled families into debt.

Although a 2015 media report noted that Tibetans and other minority ethnic groups made up 70 percent of government employees in the TAR, the top CCP position of TAR party secretary continued to be held by a Han Chinese, and the corresponding positions in the vast majority of all TAR counties were also held by Han Chinese. Within the TAR, Han Chinese also continued to hold a disproportionate number of the top security, military, financial, economic, legal, judicial, and educational positions. Han Chinese were party secretaries in eight of the nine TAPs, which are located in Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan, and Yunnan Provinces. One TAP in Qinghai Province had a Tibetan party secretary. Authorities strictly prohibited Tibetans holding government and CCP positions from openly worshipping at monasteries or otherwise publicly practicing their religion.

Government propaganda against alleged Tibetan "pro-independence forces" contributed to Chinese societal discrimination against ordinary Tibetans. Many Tibetan monks and nuns chose to wear nonreligious clothing to avoid harassment when traveling outside their monasteries and throughout China. Some Tibetans reported that taxi drivers throughout China refused to stop for them and hotels refused to provide rooms.