



General Assembly

Distr.: General
9 July 2020

English only

Human Rights Council

Forty-fourth session

15 June–3 July 2020

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[04 June 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

GE.20-09179(E)



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Curtailed freedom of expression in the Tibet Autonomous Region, China and adjacent areas where Tibetans live

Society for Threatened Peoples is concerned about the curtailment of freedom of expression in the Tibet Autonomous Region and adjacent areas where Tibetans live.

There is no freedom of expression in the Tibet Autonomous Region and adjacent areas where Tibetans live. Tibetans are subjected to high-tech surveillance and censorship. They do not have access to free information and no platform to develop and discuss ideas. Tibetans cannot freely express their thoughts and opinions and those who try are punished and persecuted. The well-known language rights activist, Tashi Wangchuk, was arrested and sentenced to five years in prison for “inciting separatism” only because he spoke to the New York Times about his intention to march to Beijing to ask for the right to preserve the Tibetan language in schools. His appeals against the sentencing were dismissed and he is denied his right to meet his lawyer to discuss his case.

Sonam Palden, a monk from Kirti Monastery, was arrested in Ngaba county in September 2019 for posting critical views on China’s policy on the Tibetan language on WeChat, a social messaging application. Wanchuk from Shigatse Prefecture was detained in March 2019 for sharing Tibetan books on WeChat. Tsering Dorjee, resident of Peleb village in Tashi Zom Township, was detained on 20 February 2019 for having a phone conversation with his younger brother in exile about the importance of the Tibetan language. He was subjected to torture in detention.

China uses its vague terminologies and absurd interpretation of laws to frame Tibetan human rights defenders who among other things advocate for the freedom of expression with criminal charges. The crackdown on land rights advocates, environmental activists and language rights advocates have raised serious questions on the abuse of laws. As mentioned above, Tashi Wangchuk was recently sentenced to five years in prison for “inciting separatism” after he spoke to the New York Times about Tibetan language education, causing an international outcry about China’s intensified crackdown on human rights defenders. The land rights advocate and crusader of anti-corruption A-nya Sengdra was imprisoned for speaking out and sentenced to seven years in years in prison in December 2019 for defending the rights of the local Tibetan nomads.

Tibetans are often subjected to unfair trial with no possibility of defending themselves. Firstly, all the court documents are in Mandarin and not Tibetan. This was also highlighted by the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in its observations published in 2018. Secondly, Tibetans are not even given a copy of the court documents, nor are they allowed to render any evidence in their defence, thus limiting their freedom of expression. They do not even have access to lawyers to defend against the charges laid against them. Even the family members and relatives of the imprisoned Tibetans get to know about it after they have already been tried and sentenced. Lodoe Gyatso, also known as Sogkhar Lodoe, was arrested for staging a peaceful protest in front of the Potala Palace in Lhasa in January 2018. His wife Gakyi was arrested for shooting a video clip of him before going to the protest. Lodoe Gyatso was sentenced to 18 years and his wife Gakyi was sentenced to two years in prison after secret trials of which the family members got to know only in November 2018.

Society for Threatened Peoples therefore calls upon the UN Human Rights Council to urge the Government of China to:

- fulfil its obligations to protect and guarantee the basic human rights of Tibetans including freedom of speech and expression, their language rights, religious freedom, movement and assembly in the Tibet Autonomous Region and adjacent areas where Tibetans live during its third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review.