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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the 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.

[29 August 2016]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Tibetans Continue to Self-Immolate due to Absence of Space to protest

Tibetans continue to resort to tragic self-immolation protests in the Tibet Autonomous Region and adjacent regions where Tibetans live. From 2009 until August 2016, 144 Tibetans have self-immolated in the Tibet Autonomous Region and the adjacent areas where Tibetans live. 125 of them have died on the spot or shortly thereafter. The whereabouts and conditions of the surviving self-immolators remain unknown. According to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), the self-immolation protests are directly related to China's effort to control religious practice and culture of Tibetans.

The Chinese government views these self-immolation protests as "an act of terrorism" incited by the "Dalai Clique." The Chinese authorities issued various guidelines aimed at punishing family members, relatives and village of the self-immolators. The guideline also bars them from travelling, applying loans, licenses and various other governmental loans. Moreover, detention and sentencing of family members of the self-immolators have become a common practice in the Tibet Autonomous Region and adjacent regions where Tibetans live.

Currently, there are more than 53 known cases of Tibetans who were sentenced to varying prison terms from one to 15 years under the alleged link to self-immolation protests.

Enforced Disappearance of the 11th Panchen Lama

Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the 11th Panchen Lama recognized by the Dalai Lama continues to be incommunicado. The Chinese authorities have continually refused to divulge any genuine information about him or his whereabouts, making his case an enforced disappearance. This year marks the 21st anniversary of enforced disappearance of the Panchen Lama.

Despite repeated appeals from a number of human rights bodies including the UN Committee against Torture, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, as well as the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief for the Panchen Lama's whereabouts to be made known, China continues to detain him.

Demolition of Larung Gar, the largest Buddhist Institute in Tibet

Chinese authorities have announced the destruction of thousands of monastic dwellings and expulsion of monks, nuns and lay practitioners at Serthar Larung Gar Buddhist Institute, the Tibetan Buddhist religious encampment located in Serthar (Chinese: Seda) County in Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province.

An eight-point document issued by the Chinese authorities spells out a step-by-step guide to demolishing housing facilities of thousands of monks, nuns and lay practitioners and their expulsion, so as to reduce the number of residents to government-set ceiling of 5,000. The document states that the demolition order was aimed at properly regulating and managing the Larung Gar Buddhist institute.

The recent four-page demolition order requires relevant departments including the management and administrative bodies of Larung Gar to reduce the number of residents to 5,000 before 30 September 2017. The order further requires that the number of demolished dwellings be equal to the number of expelled monastic or lay practitioners, and to ensure that both numbers are strictly compared and accounted for. The document then calls for a clear separation between monastic and lay practitioners and between the monastery and the institute; and the implementation of social management and provision of social services within the Larung Gar community.

On 20 July 2016, a work crew began to tear down the institute starting with those structures that were not already recorded in the government's record of permitted dwellings. On the same day Rigzin Dolma, a Tibetan Buddhist nun from Dege region committed suicide. She had lived on the Pema Khado Road inside the Larung Gar institute. She left some money that she requested in the note to be handed over to the institute. In the note she stated that she "couldn't bear the pain of endless harassment of innocent Buddhist who studies quietly at the institute."

Torture continues to remain rampant in the Tibet Autonomous Region and adjacent regions where Tibetans live

Despite the fact that China has ratified the UN Convention Against Torture & Other Cruel or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, it still continues to use torture as a means to repress dissent. The increasing number of deaths due to torture remains serious a concern with regards to the Tibet Autonomous Region and the adjacent areas where Tibetans live.

Tenzin Delek Rinpoche

On July 12, 2015, Tenzin Delek Rinpoche, 65, a highly respected Tibetan Spiritual teacher passed away under suspicious circumstances in prison.

Nyima Lhamo, niece of the late Rinpoche fled China and arrived in India on 24 July 2016. In an interview she mentioned that "my mother and I could only see his face as other parts of his body were covered. His lips were black. Even the monks who had cleaned and dressed Rinpoche's body said his finger and toenails had turned black; when they lifted the body, the back of his head felt hollow and unusually light."

Yeshe Lhakdron

Yeshe Lhakdron, a 25-year old nun from Dragka nunnery went missing after detention in 2008. Nothing has been heard about her well-being and whereabouts despite persistent effort from her family.

Lhakdron was initially arrested along with two other nuns for their peaceful protest calling for human rights and the return of the Dalai Lama in 2008. The other two nuns were released after two years but Lhakdron never returned home. Her family members were forced to believe that she succumbed to torture in police custody and conducted final ritual for her at various monasteries.

Khenrab Tharchin

On 8 August 2016, Khenrab Tharchin, a man in his 40s died while on way to the hospital. Tharchin hailed from Drushe village, Shelkar township, in Dingri county of Shigatse (in Chinese, Xigaze) prefecture. He was released in 2013 because of deteriorating health condition due to severe beating and torture he suffered while in jail. His health continued to deteriorate even after his release.

Tharchin was jailed in 2008 for refusing to participate in "patriotic re-education campaign." Tharchin openly opposed the re-education campaign held at his monastery and told the visiting work team that he could not denounce the Dalai Lama as required under the campaign.

Environmental Protest

On 5 June 2016, thousands of Tibetans living in eight villages within Amchok town, Sangchu County of Kanlho, Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Gansu Province were involved in a series of anti-mining protests that entered its sixth day. To deter these protests, Chinese security forces including the police, armed police and the military launched a violent crackdown on peaceful anti-mining protesters. The protestors were beaten and detained.

The "Gong Ngon Lari" sacred mountain site has a special place in the history of local citizens who believe that the mountain is home to their protector deity. Years of open-pit gold mining at this sacred mountain have destroyed the natural environment, violated the belief system of local Tibetans and harmed the social harmony of the local community.

For years, local Tibetans have staged numerous peaceful protests including self-immolations and submitted petitions but local authorities failed to act on their requests to cease mining activities.

Similarly, over 100 women from Gachoe village in the Tibet Autonomous Region's Lhundrub (Chinese: Linzhou) county protested in front of county offices on June 13. Tibetan farmers were driven to desperation by authorities' confiscation of their land, with amounts paid in compensation far less than the amounts originally offered.

The Chinese authorities had promised to compensate the farmers at the rate of 200,000 yuan for each mu of land, but they were only given about 20,000 yuan per mu, adding that the farmers are now demanding at least 180,000 yuan per mu.

Officials in an eastern county of China's Tibet Autonomous Region are confiscating land at a low price from local Tibetans for re-sale at a profit to Chinese developers, meanwhile threatening to jail all those who refuse to sell. The move by authorities in Riwoche (Chinese: Leiwuqi) county in the TAR's Chamdo (Chinese: Changdu) prefecture is being made with the excuse that the land belongs to local government and the Chinese Communist Party. They offer compensation at a nominal rate of 25 yuan per square meter of land, with anyone refusing to sign on these terms threatened with jail time. Land taken from Tibetans at the low rate is then sold to Chinese developers at a profit, adding that newly built apartments are being sold back at high prices to the Tibetans from whom the land was first taken.

In conclusion, Society for Threatened Peoples calls upon the United Nations Human Rights Council to urge the People's Republic of China to:

- End all of its repressive policies and practices,
 - Stop collective punishment on the villagers and family members of the self-immolators,
 - Provide verifiable and genuine information on the whereabouts and well-being of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima and his family,
 - Allow independent international investigation into the circumstances surrounding the sudden and suspicious death of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche,
 - To release all prisoners of conscience,
 - To implement all the recommendations made by the UN mandate holders and treaty bodies on all issues pertaining to the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and adjacent regions where Tibetans live.
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