



General Assembly

Distr.: General
2 September 2019

English only

Human Rights Council

Forty-second session

9–27 September 2019

Agenda item 4

Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

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.

[21 August 2019]

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



Freedom of opinion, expression and information in the Tibet Autonomous Region and adjacent areas where Tibetans live

Society for Threatened Peoples continued to remain concerned over reports of China's severe crackdown on the Tibetan people's freedom of opinion, expression and information. The suppressions of Tibetan people's opinion and expression have generated an unabated suppressive environment where since 2009, at least 153 Tibetans have resorted to tragic acts of self-immolation protests.

Freedom of opinion and expression are guaranteed in all International Bills of Rights. Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of human rights states "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers." Similarly, Article 35 of the constitution of People's Republic of China ensures that its people enjoy the freedom of speech, of press, of assembly, of association and of demonstration.

Regrettably, the ground situation is far different. Any independent opinion, expression and information other than that of Chinese government viewpoints are curtailed and considered "subversive". Tibetans who speak to and contact any foreign media (persons or organization) and share information about the situation in the Tibet Autonomous Region and adjacent areas where Tibetans live through phones, e-mails or social media platforms are charged of "leaking state secret" and given lengthy prison sentences.

Due to stringent surveillance and suppression, Tibetans relay information about the situation in the Tibet Autonomous Region and adjacent areas where Tibetans live at high risk, often at the cost of their lives. The following specific cases indicate the height of China's unrelenting restriction on freedom of opinion, expression and information of Tibetans.

Lodoe Gyatso, a 57-year-old former Tibetan political prisoner, was sentenced to 18 years in 2018, although the exact date and charges against him remain unknown. He went missing after he recorded a video message of less than two minutes in which he is seen expressing his thoughts on the Tibetans' non-violent movement and campaigning for world peace surfaced on social media. His wife Gakyi was sentenced to two years, allegedly for recording the video message. Until this day, their whereabouts and wellbeing are not known.

In April 2019, Sonam, a post graduate Tibetan student of Northwest Minzu University in Lanzhou, Gansu Province, was detained after he wrote an essay expressing his views and observation about the reduction in job positions available for Tibetans aspiring government jobs.

Dolkar, a Tibetan Woman, was sentenced to 15 months, allegedly for spreading information about the imprisonment of Wangchen, her nephew who was sentenced to four and a half years in May 2019. Wangchen was detained and subsequently imprisoned for praying and calling for the release of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the missing 11th Panchen Lama, one of the most important figures in Tibetan Buddhism.

China is exporting control over online content

In the age of the Internet, China's long arm to suppress freedom of opinion and expression in the virtual world is of growing concern. China's restrictive Internet policies effectively curtail the virtual space by imposing self-censorship. The suppression of online freedom of opinion and expression are not limited to regions under China only. This repression is actively exported around the world as China controls the content of online information, including social media available outside China. For instance, Roy Jones, a 49-years-old hourly employee of Marriott International, was fired for liking a tweet about Tibetan matters in January 2018. Jones who worked with customers on social media for Marriott International group liked the tweet that was posted by a group called "friends of Tibet"

congratulating Marriott for listing the Tibet Autonomous Region and adjacent areas where Tibetans live as a sovereign state in a customer survey.

In a separate case, Mercedes-Benz, a German car-maker, was forced to take down its Instagram post showing one of its luxury cars along with a quote of the Dalai Lama, the exiled spiritual head of the Tibetans.

Restrictions on Foreign journalists and media reporting on the Tibet Autonomous Region and adjacent areas where Tibetans live

China's stringent restrictions on foreign journalists impose severe obstacles in obtaining live reporting on situation in regions under China's control. International journalists regularly face intimidations, surveillance and stringent restrictions while reporting on Tibet Autonomous Region and adjacent areas where Tibetans live. Independent foreign journalists are often denied visa to travel to the region.

In a survey conducted by the Foreign Correspondence Club of China, due to stringent restrictions on access and independent reporting, the number of foreign journalists who had applied for permissions to travel to Tibetan areas had fallen drastically in the past few years. China's heavy-handedness of imprisonment of Tibetans who speak to journalists also raises series of concerns to journalists about the safety of their sources. For instance, China used a New York Times video documentary as evidence against Tashi Wangchuk, a Tibetan language rights activist. He had been seen sharing his concern over shrinking space for Tibetan children to use and learn Tibetan language in the documentary. He was sentenced to five years of imprisonment in January 2018.

Society for Threatened Peoples urges the Human Rights Council to call on People's Republic of China to:

- Respect freedom of opinion and expression as guaranteed in the Chinese constitution;
 - Allow unfettered access to international media, foreign diplomats and UN mandate holders to the Tibet Autonomous Region and adjacent areas where Tibetans live;
 - Release all Tibetans who have been detained and imprisoned for expressing their views and opinions peacefully;
 - Provide information about Tibetans who are in Chinese prisons, reveal their current whereabouts and wellbeing; and
 - Enter into a substantive dialogue with envoys of the Dalai Lama to address the long-standing grievances of the Tibetan people.
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