

TIBET 2023 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution of the People's Republic of China (PRC), which cites the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), states that citizens "enjoy freedom of religious belief," but it limits protections for religious practice to "normal religious activities" without defining "normal." The constitution bans the state, public organizations, and individuals from compelling citizens to believe in, or not believe in, any religion or from discriminating against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion. CCP regulations, however, allow citizens to take part only in officially approved religious practices and stipulate religious activity "must not harm national security." CCP regulations stipulate official control of all aspects of Tibetan Buddhism, including the recognition of lamas, religious venues, groups, personnel, and schools. They prohibit "accepting domination by external forces," which authorities said included Tibetans living outside the country – particularly the Dalai Lama. Regulations require all clergy to pledge allegiance to the CCP and socialism and to "resist illegal religious activities and religious extremist ideology, and to resist infiltration by foreign forces using religion." On September 1, new administrative measures took effect requiring monasteries, temples, and other "places of religious activity" to uphold the leadership of the CCP, implement "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics," and promote the "Sinicization" of religion.

In the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and other Tibetan areas, there were reports of forced disappearances, arrests, physical abuse, and prolonged detentions without trial of monks, nuns, and other persons due to their

religious practices. The government forced clergy and laypersons to undergo “political reeducation.” Nongovernmental organizations (NGO) and media outlets reported authorities continued to arrest individuals for possessing photographs of and materials concerning the Dalai Lama and for celebrating his birthday. The NGO Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD) reported seven Tibetans were detained or sentenced to prison during the year for religious reasons.

Human rights advocacy groups and media outlets reported the government continued to restrict the size of Buddhist monasteries and other institutions and to evict monks and nuns from monasteries and prohibit them from practicing elsewhere. It forcibly resettled nomadic communities in government housing far from monasteries in what critics said were efforts to dilute religious belief and weaken the ties between monasteries and communities. In April, a UN experts panel said the government used coercive “labor transfer” and “vocational training” programs to undermine Tibetan religious, linguistic, and cultural identity and to monitor and politically indoctrinate Tibetans.

The CCP continued to promote Sinicization policies aimed at reinterpreting and rewriting religious doctrines to bring them into accordance with CCP ideology and emphasize loyalty to the CCP and the state. Authorities required monks and nuns to undergo political indoctrination and individuals entering monastic training to pledge loyalty to the CCP and reject “splittism.” TAR authorities required clergy and Tibetan government employees to denounce the Dalai Lama and express allegiance to the government-recognized Panchen Lama, Chokyi Gyalpo, who is also referred to by his secular name, Gyaltzen Norbu. The Dalai Lama-recognized Panchen Lama, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, disappeared in 1995 at the age of six along with his family, and his whereabouts remained unknown.

Authorities continued to require Buddhist monasteries to translate texts from Tibetan to Mandarin in what observers said was an effort to erase the Tibetan language. Authorities also continued to force monasteries to display portraits of CCP leaders and Tibetans to replace images of the Dalai Lama and other lamas in their homes with portraits of CCP leaders, including former Chairman Mao Zedong and General Secretary and PRC President Xi Jinping. Images of the Dalai Lama were banned, with harsh repercussions for owning or displaying his image. Repression, including arbitrary surveillance, increased around politically sensitive events, religious anniversaries, cultural events with religious components, and the Dalai Lama's birthday. Authorities canceled or curtailed lay attendance at religious events, including some that had received advanced official approval.

According to advocacy NGOs and media outlets, during the year, authorities overtly surveilled monks and nuns and curtailed their freedom of movement, encouraged families to inform on neighbors who "undermined national religious policies," and attempted to control access to social media. In August, the NGO International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) said authorities continued to collect DNA samples from Tibetans in a conflation of crime and social control. Authorities tightened restrictions on online content related to Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan language and culture. Authorities prevented children from attending traditional religious festivals, going on pilgrimages during school holidays, or receiving religious education. In an effort to Sinicize the population, authorities forced approximately one million children (estimated by one NGO to be 78 percent of all Tibetan children) to attend boarding schools that emphasized Han Chinese culture and required the use of Mandarin. Authorities destroyed Buddha statues and interfered in monastic practices, appointing official personnel and

government-approved monks to manage religious institutions. The government exerted control over the selection of Tibetan Buddhist lamas. Authorities harassed families for maintaining contact with relatives abroad. Authorities continued to harass and threaten Tibetans living abroad, particularly those who spoke out against regime abuses. Officials routinely made public statements denigrating the Dalai Lama and promoting the Sinicization of Tibetan Buddhism.

Some Tibetans reportedly continued to encounter societal discrimination when seeking employment, engaging in business, and traveling for pilgrimage, according to multiple sources.

The PRC continued to tightly restrict access to the TAR, and denied U.S. diplomats permission to visit the TAR or Tibetan autonomous prefectures (TAPs) during the year. U.S. officials repeatedly raised concerns regarding religious freedom in Tibet with Chinese government counterparts at multiple levels. U.S. officials, including the Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues, the U.S. Ambassador, and other Department of State and U.S. embassy officers continued sustained and concerted efforts to advocate the rights of Tibetans to preserve, practice, teach, and develop their religious traditions and language without government interference. U.S. officials underscored that decisions on the Dalai Lama's succession should be made solely by Tibetans, free from interference, and raised concerns regarding the disappearance since 1995 of Panchen Lama Gedhun Choekyi Nyima.

During the year, the U.S. government used a variety of diplomatic tools to promote religious freedom and accountability in Tibet, including continuing to impose visa restrictions on PRC government and CCP officials. Throughout the year, senior U.S. officials, including the Secretary of State, Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues, and Ambassador at Large for

International Religious Freedom, expressed support for Tibetans' religious, cultural, and linguistic rights. In February and October, the Special Coordinator met with high-level Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) representatives in Washington, DC, and in July, she met with the Dalai Lama in New Delhi to discuss issues pertaining to Tibet and Tibetans, including efforts toward resuming formal dialogue with the PRC. Although U.S. officials were unable to travel to the TAR during the year, they maintained contact with a wide range of religious leaders and practitioners to monitor the status of religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to official data from the 2020 estimate of the National Bureau of Statistics of China, the most recent, the total population of the TAR is approximately 3.6 million, of which Tibetans make up approximately 86 percent. Han Chinese make up approximately 12 percent. Other ethnicities comprise the remainder. Some experts, however, believe the number of Han Chinese and other non-Tibetans living there is significantly underreported. The majority of ethnic Tibetans in the PRC live across the Tibetan plateau, in the TAR, in TAPs outside the TAR, and in counties in Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu, and Yunnan Provinces. According to official census data, Tibetans constitute approximately 24.4 percent of the total population in Qinghai Province, 2.1 percent in Sichuan Province, 1.8 percent in Gansu Province, and 0.3 percent in Yunnan Province, although the percentage of Tibetans is much higher within prefectures and counties of these provinces designated as autonomous for Tibetans.

Most ethnic Tibetans practice Tibetan Buddhism, although a sizeable minority practice Bon, a pre-Buddhist indigenous religion. Small minorities practice Islam, Catholicism, or Protestantism. Some scholars estimate there

are as many as 400,000 Bon followers across the Tibetan Plateau, most of whom also follow the Dalai Lama and consider themselves to be Tibetan Buddhists. In November, the State Council published a white paper, *CPC (Communist Party of China) Policies on the Governance of Xizang [Tibet] in the New Era*, that reported the TAR contained 1,700 “sites for Tibetan Buddhism activities,” four mosques for approximately 12,000 resident Muslims, and one Catholic church with 700 members. Other residents of traditionally Tibetan areas include Han Chinese, many of whom practice Buddhism (including Tibetan Buddhism), Taoism, Confucianism, or traditional folk religions, or profess atheism, as well as Hui Muslims and non-Tibetan Catholics and Protestants.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution, which cites the leadership of the CCP and the guidance of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong and Xi Jinping Thought, states that citizens “enjoy freedom of religious belief,” but it limits protections for religious practice to “normal religious activities,” without defining “normal.” The constitution bans the state, public organizations, and individuals from discriminating against citizens for their religious beliefs and declares that religion may not be used to disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens, or interfere with the educational system. The constitution states religious bodies and affairs are not to be “subject to any foreign control.” The government recognizes five official religions: Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism. Only religious groups belonging to one of the five state-sanctioned “patriotic religious associations” representing

these religions are permitted to register with the government and legally hold worship services or other religious ceremonies and activities.

CCP regulations regarding religion are issued by the CCP's United Front Work Department (UFWD). The UFWD's Bureau of Ethnic and Religious Work manages religious affairs through the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA).

The UFWD controls the selection of Tibetan religious leaders, including lamas. Regulations stipulate that, depending on the perceived geographic area of influence of the lama, relevant administrative entities may deny permission for a lama to be recognized as reincarnated (a tenet of Tibetan Buddhism), and that these administrative entities must approve reincarnations. The UFWD claims the right to deny recognition of reincarnations of high lamas of "especially great influence." The regulations also state no foreign organization or individual may interfere in the selection of reincarnate lamas, and all reincarnate lamas must be reborn within China. The CCP maintains a registry of officially recognized reincarnate lamas.

UFWD regulations allow citizens to take part only in officially approved religious practices; these regulations assert CCP control over all aspects of religious activity, including the managing of religious venues, groups, personnel, and schools. Through local regulations issued under the framework of the national-level Management Regulation of Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries, governments of the TAR and other autonomous Tibetan areas control the registration of monasteries, nunneries, and other Tibetan Buddhist religious centers. The regulations also give the CCP formal control over building and managing religious structures and require monasteries to obtain official permission to hold large-scale religious events or gatherings.

The PRC government's Regulations on Religious Affairs require all religious groups to register with the government, impose fines on landlords who provide facilities for unauthorized religious activities, and restrict contact with overseas religious institutions. The regulations require members of religious groups to seek approval to travel abroad and prohibit "accepting domination by external forces," which authorities say include Tibetans living outside the country, particularly the Dalai Lama. The regulations submit religious schools to the same oversight as places of worship and impose restrictions on religious groups conducting business or investments, including placing limits on the amount of donations they may receive, thereby constraining property ownership and development. Publication and distribution of literature containing religious content must follow guidelines determined by the State Publishing Administration. Publication of religious material must also conform to guidelines determined by the Propaganda Department of the CCP Central Committee.

The regulations also require that religious activity "must not harm national security." While the regulations stipulate that religious groups must abide by the law, safeguard national unity, and respond to "religious extremism," the term "extremism" is undefined. Measures to safeguard unity and respond to "religious extremism" include monitoring groups, individuals, and institutions, and recommending penalties such as suspending groups and canceling clergy credentials. The regulations stipulate the online activities of religious groups must be approved by the provincial UFWD.

The Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy enacted in 2021 require all clergy to pledge allegiance to the CCP and socialism, "resist illegal religious activities and religious extremist ideology, and resist infiltration by foreign forces using religion."

On September 1, revisions to the 2005 “Administrative Measures for Religious Activity Venues” took effect requiring “places of religious activity” to uphold the leadership of the CCP, implement “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for the New Era,” and continue the Sinicization of religion. Ensuring support for and compliance with these policies is listed as the first responsibility of managers of religious institutions, who are also required to establish a system to ensure religious personnel study CCP policies. The measures also stipulate the content of sermons should both reflect “socialist core values” and be integrated with “traditional Chinese culture.” The updated measures prohibit the building of large open-air religious statues outside temples and churches, and state religious activity sites “shall integrate Chinese culture and embody Chinese style in areas such as architecture, sculpture, painting, and decoration.” They require managers of religious venues to “prevent foreign forces from using religion to infiltrate” their organization.

Regulations known as the “20 Prohibitions” forbid monks from using social media to “incite subversion, defame or insult others, assist extremist religious groups, provide undisclosed information of the state to domestic or foreign individuals or organizations, or receive or release illegal information.” Individuals who “misuse” social media may be imprisoned for up to eight years.

National measures promulgated in 2022 ban unauthorized domestic online religious content and prohibit overseas organizations and individuals from operating online religious information services in Tibet. The measures also ban content that uses “religion to incite subversion of state sovereignty, oppose the leadership of the Communist Party, undermine the socialist system, national and ethnic unity, and social stability, or to advocate

extremism, terrorism, ethnic separatism, and religious fanaticism,” and that uses “religion to obstruct the implementation of the state’s judicial, educational, marriage, social management, and other systems.”

The internet regulations also require that any individual or organization engaging in “cyberspace religious information-releasing services, reposting services, and dissemination platform services” such as streaming or publishing sermons, obtain a permit to do so within six months of the measures taking effect and validate that permit every three years. Without a permit, organizations and individuals may not proselytize online, carry out religious education or training, publish preaching or repost or link to related content, organize the carrying out of religious activities online, or broadcast religious rites, “such as obeisance to Buddha, burning incense, ordinations, services, mass, or baptisms, through means such as text, images, audio, or video, either live or in recordings.” To acquire a permit, an individual or organization must apply to the religious affairs department of the government of the province, autonomous region, or municipality where they are located.

TAR-specific regulations forbid online speech that threatens national security, including activities that could be construed as “subverting state power,” “undermining national unity,” and “damaging the honor and interests of the state.” The regulations also effectively criminalize criticism of government religious policy, communications deviating from government policies on the reincarnation of Tibetan spiritual leaders, and visiting any website deemed to contain “secessionist” content or that “undermines national unity,” placing at risk anyone interacting with Tibetan exile communities online.

Children younger than 18 are prohibited from participating in religious activities and receiving religious education, even in schools run by religious organizations. Enforcement and implementation of these rules vary widely across and within regions. One regulation states that no individual may use religion to hinder the national education system and that no religious activities may be held in schools. These regulations effectively bar Tibetan youth from entering monasteries prior to reaching age 18.

The Regulations on the Establishment of a Model Area for Ethnic Unity and Progress in the Tibet Autonomous Region require “equal opportunities” for non-Tibetan ethnic groups at all levels of government and in schools, private business companies, religious centers, and the military.

A government policy introduced in 2018 requires Tibetan monks and nuns to undergo political training in CCP ideology. Monks and nuns must not only demonstrate competence in religious studies, but they must also show “political reliability,” “moral integrity capable of impressing the public,” and a willingness to “play an active role at critical moments.”

Individuals must apply to the TAR CCP Committee to take up religious orders, and the committee may deny any application. Regulations also require monks and nuns to obtain permission from officials in both the originating and receiving counties before traveling to other prefectures or to county-level cities within the TAR to “practice their religion,” engage in religious activities, study, or teach. TAPs outside the TAR have similar regulations.

At the central level, the CCP Central Committee’s Central Tibet Work Coordination Group and the UFWD are responsible for developing and implementing religious management policies, which are carried out with

support from the five state-sanctioned patriotic religious associations: the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (Protestant), Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, Chinese Taoist Association, Islamic Association of China, and Buddhist Association of China (BAC). At local levels, party leaders and branches of the UFWD, SARA, and BAC are required to coordinate implementation of the government's religious policies in monasteries.

CCP members and retired government officials, including Tibetans, are required to be atheists and are forbidden from engaging in religious practices. CCP members who are found to belong to religious organizations are subject to various types of punishment, including termination of their employment and expulsion from the CCP.

Government Practices

Abuses Involving Violence, Detention, or Mass Resettlement

Human rights organizations and media reported authorities exercised strict control over telephone and online communications in Tibetan areas. As a result, some disappearances, arrests, detentions, deaths, and destruction of religious property that occurred in prior years only became known during 2023. The government continued to control access to Tibetan areas, limiting the spread of information and making it difficult to ascertain the exact number of individuals imprisoned because of their religious beliefs or affiliation, determine the charges brought against them, or assess the extent and severity of abuses they suffered.

Because religion and ethnicity are often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize some incidents as being solely based on religious identity. TCHRD reported authorities detained 5,616 Tibetan political prisoners since 1990,

including 3,153 clergy, although many had been released. The NGO said 13 Tibetans were detained or sentenced to prison during the year, including seven for religious reasons. The NGO International Tibet Network reported there were more than 700 political prisoners in Tibet as of November, including activists, singers, teachers, writers, and clergy. Many were serving long sentences for taking part in peaceful antigovernment protests in 2008, but others had been arrested and sentenced more recently for “splittism” and “endangering state security” for promoting Tibetan language and culture or performing religious rites.

Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported in February that Buddhist monk Phende Gyaltsen died in prison on January 26, less than a year after his arrest. Authorities prohibited his family from performing last rites, denied local residents permission to pay respects to his body, and warned local residents not to spread news of his death. He was reportedly healthy before his imprisonment. RFA said police arrested him “for actively engaging in the renovation of Shedrub Dhargyeling Monastery in Lithang (Mandarin: Litang), Kardze (Ganzi) TAP, Sichuan Province.

Unlike in previous years, there were no known reports or credible allegations the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings.

There were no reports of Tibetans self-immolating during the year as a means of protesting government policies, compared with three cases in 2022. According to the NGO ICT, since 2009, 159 Tibetan clergy and laypersons had set themselves on fire in protest against what they said was the occupation of Tibet and abuses of Tibetans’ religion and culture under PRC rule. The number of self-immolations decreased since 2013, and experts and local sources attributed this to tighter control measures by

authorities and the fear that family members and associates of self-immolators might be punished. Self-immolation is considered homicide, and family members, teachers, and religious leaders may be charged as accessories to homicide if a relative, pupil, or follower chooses to self-immolate.

The whereabouts of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, recognized as the 11th Panchen Lama by the Dalai Lama and most Tibetan Buddhists, remained unknown since his 1995 forced disappearance by Chinese authorities. Nyima was six years old at the time he and his family were reportedly abducted. The Panchen Lama is considered by the Gelugpa school of Tibetan Buddhism to be the second-most-prominent leader after the Dalai Lama. On April 25, the Tibetan diaspora marked the occasion of Nyima's 34th birthday. Advocacy groups called on the government to release him and allow him to resume his religious duties.

In January, RFA reported authorities continued to arrest and hold incommunicado monks, writers, protesters, and other Tibetan figures. RFA said authorities continued to hold incommunicado Palgon, a Tibetan writer from Golog TAP, Qinghai Province, whom they arrested in August 2022 for contacting individuals in exile to offer prayers to the Dalai Lama. A researcher for TCHRD said detaining individuals who contacted Tibetans outside the country served "to disconnect the two, and [was] also an attempt to obstruct the influence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and other religious figures inside Tibet whom Tibetans revere."

The NGO Free Tibet reported in January that authorities had arrested and were continuing to detain Tibetan monk and writer Rongwo Gangkar from the Rongwo Monastery in Rebkong (Tongren) County, Malho (Huangnan) TAP, Qinghai Province. Gangkar disappeared in 2021 after he spoke about

the importance of celebrating events related to the Dalai Lama at an informal gathering in Rebkong. Authorities did not release any formal charges nor acknowledgement of Gangkar's arrest, and it was unclear whether he had been convicted.

The India-based Tibetan news source *Phayul* reported that on October 26, authorities arrested Wangchuk Tso, a Tibetan woman from Dronglong village, Qilian (Dhola) County, Tsojang (Haibei) TAP, Qinghai Province, for sharing a photograph of the Dalai Lama in a WeChat group and maintaining contact with Tibetans in exile. Police refused to allow her family to visit her or to provide any information regarding her well-being.

In November, RFA reported that authorities in Sertar (Seda) County, Kardze TAP, Sichuan Province, sentenced four men to two years' imprisonment for engaging in religious activities. In 2022, authorities arrested the men – Gyalo, Tsedho, Bhamo, and Kari – together with a fifth, Chugdar, for publicly stacking Buddhist *mani* stones, performing *sangsol* (an incense offering ceremony), and praying for the longevity of Buddhist religious leaders. Authorities reportedly beat Chugdar, who subsequently died of his injuries while in custody. At the time of their arrest, a source told RFA that authorities routinely prohibited inhabitants from performing the *sangsol* ritual, saying it was “harmful to the environment.”

The NGO Human Rights Protection Network reported that many Tibetan families continued to face harassment and persecution for maintaining contact with their relatives living in exile. The NGO stated authorities continued the “Crackdown on Gangs and Evils” campaign, begun in 2018, to suppress communications between Tibetans living in China and their relatives living abroad. Some Tibetans living in China were sentenced for

“illegal business operations” because they sent donations to Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in India and Nepal.

In March, RFA reported authorities increased random searches of individuals and their mobile phones, surveillance, and arrests in the region in the run-up to the anniversary of the March 10, 1959, Tibetan uprising. On March 2, authorities arrested Yangtso, a woman from Shigatse (Rikaze), Namling (Nanmulin) County, TAR, for contacting individuals outside the TAR.

RFA reported that in late October, authorities arrested Kunchok Dekpa, a Tibetan Buddhist monk from Tashi Monastery in Tewo (Diebu) County, Kenhlo (Gannan) TAP, Gansu Province, for allegedly contacting individuals outside the region. Sources told RFA that prior to his arrest, authorities frequently harassed Dakpa, who had previously studied at the Kirti Monasteries in Dharamsala, India.

Sources told media that authorities routinely physically abused Tibetan prisoners and, in some cases, denied them medical treatment. Police and prison authorities reportedly subjected some detainees and prisoners to torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, including severe beatings.

Authorities continued to detain Tibetan monk, writer, and educator Go Sherab Gyatso, also known as Gosher, from Kirti Monastery in Ngaba (Aba) TAP, Sichuan Province. In 2020, authorities detained Gyatso and held him in incommunicado for more than one year before sentencing him to 10 years in prison in a secret trial in 2021. Gyatso was reportedly in declining health.

Reports from released prisoners indicated some were permanently disabled or in extremely poor health because of the harsh treatment they endured in

prison. Former prisoners also reported being isolated in small cells for months at a time and deprived of sleep, sunlight, and adequate food.

Human rights groups reported authorities continued to criminalize the sharing or possession of photographs of, or statements by, the Dalai Lama and increased arrests in the days surrounding the Dalai Lama's birthday on July 6. RFA reported on September 27 that authorities in February arrested Tsultrim in Kyungchu (Qiongxixi) County, Ngaba TAP, Sichuan Province, for possessing photographs of the Dalai Lama on his mobile phone. They sentenced him to two years in prison in April. RFA said authorities previously detained Tsultrim from July to September 2022 for possessing photographs of the Dalai Lama and sharing them on social media and beat him while in custody.

According to local sources, authorities often forced political prisoners, particularly monks and nuns, to perform patriotic songs and dances praising the CCP and to watch propaganda films. If participants were uninterested, authorities considered it evidence of disloyalty to the state and subjected them to severe punishment, including beatings, and refused them permission to receive gifts of food or clothing from visiting family members.

Media outlets and human rights groups continued to report local officials in Tibetan areas explicitly stated supporters of the Dalai Lama and other religious leaders could be arrested under the government's nationwide campaign against organized crime and encouraged Tibetans to inform on anyone who "links up with the Dalai clique."

The government continued to place restrictions on the size of Buddhist monasteries and other institutions and to implement a campaign begun in 2016 to evict monks and nuns from monasteries. While exact numbers were

difficult to ascertain, human rights groups and local sources said that between 2016 and 2019 (the most recent information available), authorities evicted between 6,000 and 17,000 Tibetan and Han Chinese monks and nuns from Larung Gar and Yachen Gar Tibetan Buddhist Institutes, both in Kardze TAP, Sichuan Province.

According to local sources and media reports, authorities continued to prohibit monks and nuns from returning to rebuild their monastic communities. Authorities also specifically prohibited monastics expelled from Larung Gar and Yachen Gar from transferring to other monasteries to continue their religious education. Free Tibet reported authorities continued to replace monastic structures in Yachen Gar with hotels and other infrastructure to promote the site as a destination for Han Chinese tourists.

During the year, the government reportedly continued its policy of resettling previously nomadic Tibetans in government-subsidized housing units. The government stated this was part of its policy of relocating Tibetans away from high altitude “forbidden areas of life” for “ecological reasons.” In many cases, resettlements were located near township and county government seats or along major roads that had no monasteries nearby. Traditionally, Tibetan villages were clustered around monasteries, which provided religious and other services to members of the community, but the government prohibited construction of new religious sites near the resettlements without prior approval. Many Tibetans reportedly continued to view these relocation measures as CCP and government efforts to dilute religious belief and weaken the ties between monasteries and communities.

On April 27, a UN experts panel that included Tomoya Obokata, special rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, Alexandra Xanthaki, special

rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, and Fernand de Varennes, special rapporteur on minority issues, issued a statement saying the government's coercive "labor transfer" and "vocational training" programs in Tibet were a pretext to undermine Tibetan religious, linguistic, and cultural identity and to monitor and politically indoctrinate Tibetans. They warned such programs could lead to situations of forced labor. The experts found that Tibetans in the program were prevented from using the Tibetan language and discouraged from expressing their religious identity.

In the June issue of *China Quarterly*, researchers reported that authorities responsible for the TAR's "extremely high-altitude ecological resettlement" program in Nagchu (Naqu) Prefecture claimed 100 percent of targeted pastoral families "voluntarily" agreed to participate. The researchers said that despite official prohibitions on forced resettlement, their investigation found local officials threatened and coerced some reluctant families with penalties if they refused to "voluntarily" resettle. In June, the NGO Tibet Watch reported authorities seized pastoral land from many nomadic families in in Rebkong (Tongren), Malho (Huangnan) TAP, Qinghai Province, without restitution. Tibet Watch said the move was part of "the forced assimilation of Tibetan minority identity into the dominant Han-Chinese majority."

Abuses Limiting Religious Belief and Expression

The government continued carrying out its 2019-23 five-year plan to Sinicize Buddhism in China by emphasizing loyalty to the CCP and the state. The Sinicization plan included Tibetan Buddhism, with the involvement of the state-run BAC. Regulations promulgated in 2020 and 2021 further formalized administrative procedures for Sinicizing all religions, including Tibetan Buddhism, in order to "follow the path of socialism with Chinese

characteristics,” “correctly handle the relationship between national law and canon,” and place more ideological controls on the training, selection, and monitoring of clergy. Authorities continued to require Buddhist monasteries to translate texts from Tibetan to Mandarin in what observers said constituted an ongoing attempt to erase the Tibetan language.

In August, ICT published a report entitled *Generation Change: 10 Years of Xi Jinping's Sinification and Securitization of Tibetans*. In it, the NGO stated authorities targeted Tibetans for assimilation “because of their socio-political identity based on the Tibetan tradition of Buddhism.” Although the PRC officially recognized Buddhism in general, “the CCP continues to hold an antagonistic view toward Tibetan Buddhism. While the Chinese tradition of Buddhism is held as part of the indigenous Chinese culture, Tibetan Buddhism is viewed as a deviant needing guidance from the party.”

In October, Tsewang Gyalpo Arya, representative of the Liaison Office of the Dalai Lama for Japan and East Asia, wrote an op-ed for the religious liberty and human rights magazine *Bitter Winter* discussing the impact on Tibet of the new regulations on religious activity venues that took effect on September 1. Arya stated the regulations contradicted the constitution's guarantees of freedom to practice religion and said, “Where is religious freedom if the religious bodies are forced to assimilate and adopt the ideology of an individual or a system that does not believe in religion at all?” He said the new rules on establishing and registering monasteries and temples, which included 16 articles and 20 subclauses, made creating such venues “a very fastidious and confusing task.” The prohibition against naming religious venues after sects or persons would prevent the traditional Buddhist practice of naming monasteries or temples after a school of Buddhist thought or a religious leader. The prohibition on building large open-air religious statues outside of temples retroactively justified the CCP's

destruction of several large Buddhist statues in Tibet in recent years. Arya said the requirement that religious venues use traditional Han architecture and decoration “demonstrates the CCP’s leadership’s policy to force Chinese culture upon minorities with total disregard for the latter’s religious beliefs and culture.” Provisions on religious education encouraged “forced indoctrination inculcating the CCP’s ideology and propaganda.”

According to multiple sources, authorities required monasteries throughout Tibetan areas of the country to integrate CCP members into their governance structures, where they exercised control over monastic admissions, education, security, and finances. Requirements introduced by the party included geographic residency limitations on who may be a member of each monastery.

A 2022 government directive reportedly remained in place for all provinces and municipalities in the TAR instructing that workers employed in government offices, schools, or hospitals must renounce the Dalai Lama and declare their loyalty to the CCP as a condition of employment. RFA reported that in November, an official directive advertising 554 new public-sector jobs in Sigatse (Xigaze) Prefecture, TAR, sought applicants who, among other qualifications, were “trustworthy and reliable citizens” who were willing to denounce the Dalai Lama, refrain from separatism, and remain loyal to the CCP. Pema Gyal, a researcher at Tibet Watch, told RFA, “The Chinese government has often used the employment and education system as an opportunity to suppress Tibetans inside Tibet and violate their basic human rights. Such guidelines and repressive conditions for job candidates created by the authorities have only made the livelihood of Tibetans very difficult.”

Abuses Involving the Ability of Individuals to Engage in Religious Activities Alone or In Community with Others

According to TCHRD, in January, authorities in Zungchu (Songpan) County, Ngaba TAP, Sichuan Province, fined Gephel, a Tibetan university student, 50,000 renminbi (RMB) (\$7,000) and ordered him to attend weekly “political education” sessions after he organized a Losar celebration for Tibetan New Year. Authorities reportedly objected to the event displaying Buddhist flags, featuring Tibetan-language-only decorations and performances, and the noninclusion of songs praising the CCP or the government. They accused Gephel of “engaging in activities aimed at splitting the Chinese nation.” Authorities demanded future event presenters speak only in Mandarin, although most attendees were local Tibetan nomads who could not understand the language. TCHRD stated, “Language is a significant component of a person’s cultural identity and religious practices... Since the Tibetan language is the carrier of Tibetan culture and a critical part of studying and practicing Tibetan Buddhism, the Tibetan language is paramount to preserving Tibetan cultural identity.”

In advance of the Dalai Lama’s birthday in July, authorities reportedly suppressed any use of social media to organize gatherings or use symbols that would imply a celebration of the event. The TAR Internet and Information Office ran a research project entitled “Countermeasures to Internet-based Reactionary Infiltration by the Dalai Lama Clique.”

Bitter Winter reported that on December 12, police in Jyekundo (Gyegu), Yushu TAP, Qinghai Province, shut down an exhibition of thousands of *mani* prayer stones and detained the four organizers – Nyima, Lhoga, Tsedar, and Rinchen – for misusing religion and “deceiving the masses.” Local Buddhist devotees told *Bitter Winter* that authorities increasingly labeled forms of devotion that were popular among Tibetans as “superstition” and prohibited them.

RFA reported authorities sometimes interfered with registered gatherings. In July, the government canceled a *Kalachakra* (Wheel of Time) teaching session in Qinghai and Gansu Provinces at the last minute, despite organizers previously receiving approval. Tibet Watch reported police at the Qinghai gathering, which was already underway when they disrupted it, destroyed the monk's ritual sand mandala in front of worshippers. In September, authorities attempted to limit participation in a Kalachakra gathering in Gansu led by the seventh Gungthang Rinpoche, Lobsang Jamyang Gelek Tenpai Khenchen, by interrogating would-be participants and restricting entry to residents living near the event site. While thousands ultimately participated, the *Tibet Times* reported police arrested Tsebo, a Tibetan former police official and member of the CCP, for attempting to attend.

In August, RFA reported that in advance of the annual yogurt festival in Lhasa, which features Tibetan Buddhist events as well as other expressions of traditional Tibetan culture, authorities issued a directive prohibiting current and former government employees from participating. Police heavily policed the event and checked identity cards of participants.

The TAR government reportedly continued to maintain tight control over the use of Tibetan Buddhist religious relics and declared them, religious buildings, and religious institutions to be state property.

Sources reported authorities continued to exercise control over religious gatherings of laypersons, confining many such activities to officially designated places of worship and preventing monks from traveling to villages for politically sensitive events and religious ceremonies. Religious figures and laypersons continued to report difficulty traveling to

monasteries outside their home regions, both within the TAR and in other parts of the country. Travelers said they encountered roadblocks and police checkpoints surrounding major monasteries, with security personnel often checking their identity cards and refusing entry to nonresidents. Tibetans wishing to visit family members residing in monasteries noted frequent refusals or limits on their ability to visit. Local sources continued to report similar restrictions on their movements and said checkpoints and fear of detention prevented them from visiting monasteries and participating in religious events. Authorities also required Tibetans traveling between provinces to register with police. Many monks expelled from their monasteries after 2008 protests in Lhasa and other areas, such as Ngaba TAP, Sichuan Province, had not returned, some because of government prohibitions.

RFA reported authorities increased random searches and mobile phone checks in Lhasa, Shigatse, and Chamdo during Losar in February. Sources said that before the holiday, authorities warned against holding events that “could endanger national security.” As in prior years, TAR authorities banned monks and nuns from leaving their monasteries and nunneries during Losar, and they heavily policed pilgrimage sites. Sources stated officials continued to urge Tibetans to report on foreign visitors to these areas and other “suspicious activities,” in accordance with a policy in place for many years.

In August, the *Tibet Times* reported monks from majority-Tibetan areas of Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu, and Yunnan Provinces faced multiple bureaucratic obstacles intended to discourage them from traveling to Lhasa. Those seeking to travel required permits from up to seven separate government entities. It was reportedly particularly difficult for monks who had participated in “political activities,” including the large-scale peaceful

protests of 2008, to obtain all the necessary permits. One source told the *Tibet Times* that authorities paid individuals to spy on traveling monks.

RFA reported authorities closed the Jokhang Temple, Potola Palace, and monasteries in Lhasa during the National Day holiday week in October marking the 74th anniversary of the PRC's founding. Authorities warned government officials, office staff, and students that if they visited religious sites or went on pilgrimages, they risked losing their jobs and pensions or being expelled from schools. Officials reportedly compelled monks in monasteries to celebrate National Day on October 1 and participate in political education sessions.

Local authorities continued to invoke regulations concerning safeguarding national unity and responding to "religious extremism" as justification for monitoring individuals, groups, and institutions and punishing adherents of religious leaders such as the Dalai Lama. According to media reports, the Ministry of Public Security used tens of millions of surveillance cameras throughout the country to monitor the general public and also installed overt surveillance systems at monasteries. One Tibetan worshipper told RFA in September that in order to visit a local monastery he had to submit to being scanned with a facial recognition camera. Human rights groups stated authorities increasingly relied on the cameras and other forms of surveillance to monitor and intimidate political dissidents, religious leaders, and adherents. These included facial recognition and gait recognition video surveillance, allowing police not only to monitor a situation but also to quickly identify individuals in crowds.

RFA reported authorities electronically and manually monitored private correspondence and searched, without warrants, private homes and businesses for photographs of the Dalai Lama and other forbidden items.

Police routinely examined TAR residents' mobile phones in random stops or as part of other investigations to search for "reactionary music" from India or photographs of the Dalai Lama. Authorities also questioned and detained some individuals who disseminated writings and photographs over the internet or listened to teachings of the Dalai Lama on their mobile phones.

In June, RFA reported authorities conducted random searches of monasteries in Shentsa (Shenzha) and Sok (Suo) Counties, Nagchu Prefecture, TAR, scrutinizing monks' prayer manuscripts and books and removing prayer flags from shrines. During the searches at Gaden Shartsa Monastery, they forced monks to sign a large "declaration board" denouncing the Dalai Lama and "separatism" and pledging loyalty to the PRC.

Sources continued to report party leaders and branches of the UFWD, SARA, and BAC stationed party and government officials, including security agents, in monasteries in Tibetan areas. Provincial, prefectural, county, and local governments continued to establish police stations or security offices adjacent to or on the premises of many monasteries and nunneries. Sources estimated that in 2018 (the most recent information available), more than 15,000 government employees were working in approximately 3,000 Tibetan monasteries.

In 2022, the University of Toronto's Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy published a study that found the government had collected DNA samples from between one-quarter and one-third of Tibet's population since June 2016. Analyzing 100 publicly available sources, including social media posts and government sources, the study found police "targeted men, women, and children for DNA collection outside of any ongoing criminal investigation. In some cases, police targeted Buddhist monks." The

study stated, “Monks are important pillars of Tibetan society and have participated in protests against the Chinese government and state policy... In response, authorities have sought to discipline Tibet’s monastic community through surveillance, arrests, and prosecutions. It is therefore not surprising that police have also targeted monks for DNA collection. In Chamdo (Changdu) Prefecture, TAR, data collection reportedly included the region’s 78 temples and religious sites.” The study cited as one example a Yangzhuo Public Security Bureau posting on WeChat stating that on May 18-19, 2022, police from the Tallinn Qudi Temple Police station in NaKardze (Langkazi) County, Lhoka (Shannan) Prefecture, TAR, collected blood samples from monks as part of what bureau officials called efforts “to continuously improve the DNA database of public security organs.” The University of Toronto study concluded, “Without checks on police powers, police in Tibet will be free to use a completed mass DNA database for whatever purpose they see fit” and that “DNA data stored in a population database could also be used to justify the arrest, prosecution, and detention of government critics, civil society activists, monks, and ordinary people.”

According to multiple sources in the TAR and in other Tibetan areas, officials continued to maintain a watch list of family members, relatives, and close friends of self-immolators to prevent them from meeting and communicating with international visitors, and, in some cases, deprived them of public benefits.

Human rights groups stated authorities continued to use the Regulations on the Establishment of a Model Area for Ethnic Unity and Progress in the Tibet Autonomous Region, adopted in 2020, to further impose central government control and Han culture on the Tibetan population and encourage Tibetans to inform on their neighbors, including those deemed to have “undermined national religious policies.” According to ICT, “Pressure

on individual Tibetans to report on their neighbors is intensified by the widespread use of surveillance technologies. If cameras and facial recognition algorithms pick up activity deemed suspicious, those who witnessed it, yet failed to report it, also fall under suspicion, and may face interrogation at length.”

Human rights groups and local sources reported that during the year, authorities continued to expand the requirement that families replace images of the Dalai Lama and other lamas in their homes with portraits of preeminent CCP leaders, including Chairman Mao and President Xi. According to local sources, authorities required all monasteries, schools, and offices in the TAR and Tibetan areas to display pictures of CCP leaders and the national flag. Sources said authorities conducted inspections to check for compliance.

As well as prohibiting the open veneration of the Dalai Lama, including the display of his photograph, the government also continued to ban pictures of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, whom the Dalai Lama and nearly all Tibetan Buddhists recognize as the 11th Panchen Lama. In some counties of the TAR, punishments for displaying images of the Dalai Lama included expulsion from monasteries.

In addition to national regulations on internet religious content, in 2022, the TAR Cyberspace Administration announced specific “rectification” measures for the region to address threats such as “undermining national religious policies and promoting harmful information such as cults and feudal superstitions.” The measures urged citizens to report online live webcasts and short videos containing illegal content to a government email address or telephone tip line.

RFA reported in May that authorities tightened restrictions on online content related to religion, leading to an effective ban on Tibetan writers or Buddhist monks spreading religious content online. Authorities removed Tibetan-language options from apps such as Talkmate and the video streaming service Bilibili. Sources told RFA that authorities monitored the social media accounts of Tibetan artists and “if any Tibetan artist tries to represent Tibetan culture and tradition on their social media platform, their accounts are disconnected.” Authorities also censored livestream performances of Tibetan artists.

Tibetan rights organizations and media reported authorities continued to destroy religious monuments across the region and to arrest individuals who protested. In September, a researcher at Pepperdine University wrote in *Global Dispatches* that ICT estimated that of the approximately 6,000 monasteries that once existed in Tibet, only 13 were still undamaged. The researcher stated, “For Tibetans, religion is also deeply intertwined with humanity’s relationship to their surroundings. Many natural sites that have been long-considered sacred are now endangered by resource exploitation and development projects that hinder faith activities. Mount Kailash and Lake Mapham in Western Tibet, for example, are significant holy sites vulnerable to such risks, putting the survival of their spiritual landscape for current and future generations in danger.”

In January, Free Tibet released a report entitled *Desecration in Drago County: Destruction of Tibetan Religious Heritage, Arbitrary Detentions, and Torture*. The report stated that from 2021-22, authorities in Drago (Luhuo) County, Kardze TAP, Sichuan Province, ordered the demolition of a series of Tibetan Buddhist religious sites and cultural institutions. Officials reportedly claimed the sites, which included a 99-foot-tall bronze Buddha statue, a monastic school, prayer wheels, and a temple at the Drago Monastery,

violated various building and fire codes or lacked proper authorization prior to construction. The report said local officials coerced influential Tibetan Buddhist monks into convincing local residents to accept the demolitions, and later forced monks and residents to assist with the demolitions. Authorities detained and, in some cases, beat at least 10 individuals for opposing the demolitions or for sending information about the demolitions, including photographs, outside the country.

Multiple sources reported the government continued to interfere in the religious education of lay persons and children. Authorities restricted children from attending traditional religious festivals or from going on pilgrimages during school holidays. TAR authorities required monks to cancel all classes with children, warning that monks and parents could have their social security benefits restricted or be detained if classes taught by monks continued. The ban on religious education was also implemented in some places outside of the TAR.

On February 6, a UN experts panel consisting of the UN special rapporteur on minority issues, special rapporteur on the right to education, and special rapporteur in the field of cultural rights issued a statement criticizing the government policy of attempting to assimilate one million Tibetan children “culturally, religiously, and linguistically” through the residential boarding school system. The NGO Tibet Action Institute estimated in 2021 that this comprised 78 percent of all Tibetan children. The UN experts reported educational materials used in residential schools reflected the majority Han culture. These schools required completion of a “compulsory education” curriculum in Mandarin and denied Tibetan children access to traditional or culturally relevant learning. The experts stated, “As a result, Tibetan children are losing their facility with their native language and the ability to communicate easily with their parents and grandparents in the Tibetan

language, which contributes to their assimilation and erosion of their identity.” The experts stated the number of Tibetan children in boarding schools was much higher than the national average “and this percentage has been increasing in recent years.” Authorities continued to close rural schools in Tibetan-majority areas, the experts said, forcing more Tibetan children to board at township- or county-level schools far from their homes that almost exclusively used Mandarin for instruction. In March, the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights raised similar concerns in its concluding observations to China’s third periodic report.

In an October interview with the China Digital Times, Tibet Action Institute director Lhadon Tethong expressed concern that children in boarding schools “lose their family connections, their culture, their language, [and] their Buddhism 100 percent, because they’re not allowed to have any exposure to Buddhism, only when they’re home with their families, which is pretty rare.”

RFA reported in October that authorities banned the teaching and use of the Tibetan language in government-run nonboarding elementary and middle schools in Kardze TAP and Ngaba TAP, both in Sichuan Province. According to RFA, approximately 90 percent of Kardze TAP’s one million residents are Tibetan. Critics of the move said the government was “trying to completely wipe out the Tibetan language.” RFA reported authorities also mandated a switch from Tibetan- to Mandarin-language instruction at some middle schools in Amdo (Anduo) County, Nagchu Prefecture, TAR.

RFA reported officials summoned more than 400 teachers and students from elementary and middle schools in Ngari (Ali) Prefecture, TAR, to attend an “antiseparatism” workshop in October. Organizers told attendees to pledge their allegiance to state ideology and condemn separatism and the

Dalai Lama. Organizers instructed attendees to refrain from imparting any education related to religion.

The government continued to maintain that Gyaltzen Norbu, whom it selected in 1995, was the Panchen Lama's true reincarnation, rather than Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, whom authorities disappeared that same year. Norbu remained the vice president of and highest-ranking Tibetan in the government-affiliated BAC. According to numerous Tibetan Buddhist monks and scholars, SARA and provincial religious affairs bureau officials frequently pressured monks and laypersons, including government officials, to attend religious study sessions presided by Norbu. *Bitter Winter* reported that on November 4, Norbu ordained 28 monks in the Tashi Lhunpo Monastery in Shigatse, Namling County, TAR, the traditional seat of the Panchen Lama. In his sermon, he instructed the new monks to "be grateful to the Party, listen to the Party, follow the Party, promote the Party."

According to state media outlet *Xinhua*, Norbu met Politburo member and head of the CCP Central Committee UFWG Shi Taifeng on February 17 in Beijing. Shi asked Norbu to "maintain consistency in ideology, politics, and action with the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping as the core." Norbu replied he would "always keep in mind the earnest teachings of Xi Jinping and conscientiously learn and implement the spirit of the 20th Party Congress."

In accordance with official guidelines for monastery management, leadership of and membership in committees and working groups continued to be restricted to individuals the guidelines described as "politically reliable, patriotic, and devoted monks, nuns, and party and government officials." General administrative affairs in all monasteries in the TAR and in many major monasteries in other Tibetan areas, which monks traditionally

managed, continued instead to be overseen by monastery management committees and monastic government working groups, both of which were composed primarily of government officials and CCP members, in addition to a few government-approved monks.

The traditional monastic system reportedly continued to decline, as many senior Buddhist teachers from Tibet remained in or died in India or elsewhere abroad. The heads of most major schools of Tibetan Buddhism – including the Dalai Lama, Karmapa, Sakya Trizin, and Khatok Getse Rinpoche, as well as Bon leader Kyabje Menr Trizin – all continued to reside abroad. The government also banned India-trained Tibetan monks, most of whom received their education from the Dalai Lama or those with ties to him, from teaching in Tibetan monasteries in China. Authorities continued to ban minors under the age of 18 from participating in monastic training. Multiple sources reported authorities forced underage monks and nuns to leave their monasteries and Buddhist schools to receive “patriotic education.” Religious leaders continued to report that authorities incentivized lamas and monks to leave monastic life voluntarily by emphasizing positive attributes of secular life, as compared to the more disciplined and austere religious life. Monastery leaders cited continued revisions to education policies, religion regulations, and government control of monastery management as reasons for the declining number of young monks. Religious leaders and scholars continued to say these and other means of interference caused them concern regarding the ability of religious traditions to survive for successive generations.

As in previous years, senior monks at some monasteries continued to report informal agreements with local officials whereby resident monks would not stage protests or commit self-immolations as long as the government adopted a hands-off approach to the management of their monasteries.

Sources said authorities monitored all financial transactions involving monasteries inside Tibet and entities abroad.

According to media outlets and NGOs, the CCP continued to maintain a list of state-approved “living buddhas.” In 2018, the BAC announced its database contained 1,311 “living buddhas” it deemed “authentic.” The Dalai Lama was reportedly not on the list. The database reportedly overlapped with the database required by the 2021 Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy, which also included monks who were not “living buddhas.” According to sources, every individual on the official reincarnation database received political training in state ideology, entirely separate from religious training, that emphasized that their career and role in the religious community depended on motivating followers “to love the Party, love the country and social stability maintenance work, as well as fight against ‘separatism’ and the Dalai Lama.”

Sources said the state required monks and nuns to demonstrate – in addition to competence in religious studies – “political reliability,” “moral integrity capable of impressing the public,” and a willingness to “play an active role at critical moments.” According to media reports, the state required all monks and nuns to participate in several sessions of “legal education” per year, during which they had to denounce the Dalai Lama, express allegiance to the government-recognized Panchen Lama, study President Xi’s speeches, study Mandarin, and hear lectures praising the leadership of the CCP and the socialist system. In March, RFA reported the Tibetan Buddhist Institute in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, required entering students pledge to abide by CCP ideology and oppose “separatists” as a condition of admission.

Transnational Repression

Sources reported PRC authorities engaged in transnational repression against the approximately 150,000 Tibetans living abroad, many as refugees in India and Nepal. They frequently subjected the Tibetan overseas community to harassment, monitoring, and cyberattacks. In a March statement, Tenzin Dorjee of the Tibet Action Institute said government authorities continued to pressure and threaten China-resident families of Tibetans living in other countries to dissuade their relatives from criticizing PRC policies towards Tibetans. Sources reported that the PRC continued to pressure Nepal to implement a border systems management agreement and a mutual legal assistance treaty that could result in the refoulement of Tibetan refugees to China, and to decline to register or issue identity documents to Tibetan refugees. Nepal did not take additional steps to implement the agreements, but also continued not to register Tibetans. Nepal last registered and issued documentation to Tibetan refugees in 1995.

Abuses Involving Discrimination or Unequal Treatment

Authorities continued to promote Han culture over Tibetan culture. Local sources said that while Mandarin and Tibetan were both official languages of the TAR, official buildings and businesses, including banks, post offices, and hospitals, frequently lacked signage in Tibetan. In many instances, forms and documents were available only in Mandarin. Mandarin was used for most official communications in many Tibetan areas.

As in past years, individuals reported continued difficulties traveling to India to receive religious training, meet with religious leaders, or visit family members living in monasteries. In many cases, Public Security Bureau officials refused to approve their passport applications. In other cases, prospective travelers were able to obtain passports only after paying bribes

to local officials. Some individuals seeking to travel said they could only obtain passports after promising not to travel to India or not to criticize government policies in Tibetan areas while overseas. In some cases, officials required family members to sign a guarantee that passport applicants would return from their travel. According to local sources, numerous Tibetans in Gansu, Qinghai, and Sichuan Provinces waited up to 10 years to receive a passport, often without any explanation for the delay. There were also instances of authorities confiscating and canceling previously issued passports, reportedly as a way of preventing Tibetans from participating in religious events in India involving the Dalai Lama.

As in past years, Tibetans who traveled to Nepal and planned to continue to India reported that PRC officials visited their families' homes in Tibet and threatened their relatives if they did not return immediately. Sichuan Province and TAR officials continued to require religious travelers returning from India to attend political training sessions. According to sources, in recent years, these restrictions had prevented thousands of Tibetans from attending religious training in India.

Restrictions remained in place for monks and nuns living abroad, particularly those in India, which made it difficult or impossible for them to travel into Tibetan areas.

According to sources, authorities in some areas continued to enforce special restrictions on Tibetans staying at hotels inside and outside the TAR. Police regulations forbade some hotels and guesthouses in the TAR from accepting Tibetan guests, particularly monks and nuns, and they required other hotels to notify police departments when Tibetan guests checked in.

The government also interfered with the ability of persons to find employment. Job announcements of different types in the TAR required applicants to “align ideologically, politically, and in action with the CCP Central Committee,” “oppose any splittist tendencies,” and “expose and criticize the Dalai Lama.” The advertisements explained that all applicants were subject to a political review prior to employment.

RFA reported in April that authorities harassed and denied access to university entrance examinations, job opportunities, and government assistance to relatives of Tibetans who self-immolated in protest of government policies. The report also said authorities discriminated against and denied access to proper medical care to Tibetans convicted of political crimes and their families.

RFA reported that on October 10, the UFWD announced the name “Xizang” (the Mandarin name for Tibet) would replace “Tibet” in official Ministry of Foreign Affairs documents and would refer exclusively to the TAR, a move analysts told RFA was part of the government’s effort to exclude and deny the ethnic Tibetan identity of areas in Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu, and Yunnan Provinces. RFA stated the commonly used name of Tibet by the international community encompassed not just the TAR, but also TAPs in Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu, and Yunnan Provinces – a geographic scope “consistent with the ‘Greater Tibet’ defined by the 14th Dalai Lama.”

Government officials regularly denigrated the Dalai Lama publicly and accused a “Dalai clique” and other “outside forces” of instigating Tibetan protests, stating such acts were attempts to “split” China. The State Council’s November white paper *CPC Policies on the Governance of Xizang in the New Era* said, “The reactionary nature of the Dalai Group has been exposed and denounced, and the regional government relies closely on the

people of all ethnicities to resist all forms of secession and sabotage... They are ever more determined to safeguard the country's unity, national sovereignty, and ethnic solidarity." The document said the theology and practice of Tibetan Buddhism were to be regulated by law, and that "reincarnated Tibetan living Buddhas, including Dalai Lamas and Panchen Rinpoches, must be looked for within the country, decided through the practice of lot-drawing from the golden urn, and receive approval from the central government."

Free Tibet reported that during a June 29 press conference titled "New Xizang in the New Era with New Vitality," officials from the China Tibetology Research Center said, "The reincarnation of Living Buddhas must be approved by the central government" and "the [Dalai Lama's] successor must be searched for within China." Free Tibet stated, "China's false sense of authority on the matter is not recognized by the Dalai Lama himself, Tibetans, Buddhist practitioners or world leaders." Officials also attacked critics of the region's residential boarding school system.

Authorities continued to justify in state media their interference with Tibetan Buddhist monasteries by associating the monasteries with "separatism" and pro-independence activities.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Tibetans, particularly those who wore traditional and religious attire, regularly reported being denied hotel rooms, refused service by taxi drivers, and discriminated against in employment and in business transactions.

Many Han Buddhists continued to demonstrate interest in Tibetan Buddhism and donated money to Tibetan monasteries and nunneries, according to local sources in such monasteries and nunneries. In addition, a growing number of Han Buddhists visited Tibetan monasteries, although officials sometimes imposed restrictions that made it difficult for Han Buddhists to conduct long-term study at many monasteries in Tibetan areas. State propaganda reported on these activities.

Tibetan Buddhist monks sometimes visited cities outside the TAR to provide religious instruction to Han Buddhists.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The PRC continued to tightly restrict diplomatic access to the TAR and denied U.S. diplomats permission to visit the TAR or TAPs during the year.

U.S. officials repeatedly raised concerns regarding religious freedom in Tibet with Chinese government counterparts at multiple levels. U.S. officials, including the Secretary of State, Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues (Special Coordinator), the Ambassador, and other Department of State and embassy officials continued sustained and concerted efforts to advocate the rights of Tibetans to preserve, practice, teach, and develop their religious traditions and language without interference from the government.

Officials expressed concerns to the Chinese government at senior levels regarding the severe restrictions imposed on Tibetans' ability to exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms, including religious freedom and cultural rights. Officials underscored U.S. concern to PRC officials on the government's refusal to engage in dialogue with the Dalai Lama. U.S. officials continued to underscore that only the Dalai Lama and other faith leaders could decide the succession of the Dalai Lama, and that Tibetan

Buddhists, like members of all faith communities, should be able to select, educate, and venerate their religious leaders in accordance with their beliefs and without government interference.

U.S. officials also raised concerns regarding the disappearance of the Panchen Lama, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima. U.S. officials expressed concern and sought further information about individual cases and incidents of religious persecution and discrimination.

During the year, the U.S. government used a variety of diplomatic tools to promote religious freedom and accountability in Tibet, including taking steps to impose visa restrictions on officials involved in the forced assimilation of more than one million Tibetan children in residential boarding schools. It continued imposing visa restrictions on PRC government and CCP officials whom the U.S. government determined to be “substantially involved in the formulation or execution of policies related to access for foreigners to Tibetan areas,” pursuant to the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act of 2018.

In February, the Special Coordinator, National Security Council Senior Director for Democracy and Human Rights, and U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom met with Sikyong Penpa Tsering and other high-level CTA representatives in Washington, DC. In October, the Special Coordinator met again with Sikyong Penpa Tsering and the ICT chairman.

On February 22, the Special Coordinator hosted a Losar reception in Washington, DC, for CTA representatives, local Tibetan community leaders, NGOs, and U.S. government officials. At the event, she said the United States’ “resolve to advance the human rights and dignity of all Tibetans, as well as preserve their distinct religious, cultural, and linguistic identity, is unwavering.” The Secretary told the gathering, “[W]e remain firm in our

resolve to defend and promote the human rights of Tibetans – including efforts to preserve and pass on the community’s distinct linguistic, cultural, and religious heritage. Tibetans must be able to select their religious leaders free from interference, to live without fear of repression, and to practice the rich traditions – including this Losar holiday – that Tibetans have for centuries.”

On March 28, the Special Coordinator stated the PRC’s government-run boarding schools and involuntary, mass DNA collection were “policies targeting ethnic minorities and religious practitioners are part of broader PRC efforts to reshape and undermine human rights globally.”

On April 25, on the occasion of Panchen Lama Gedhun Choekyi Nyima’s 34th birthday, and again on May 17, the anniversary of his disappearance, the Special Coordinator and the U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom issued statements on social media calling on PRC officials to provide immediate proof of his whereabouts and well-being. They reaffirmed U.S. support for Tibetans’ right to freedom of religion and the ability to select, educate, and venerate their religious leaders without interference.

On May 9, the Secretary of State stated the U.S. government was “concerned by reports of the spread of mass DNA collection to Tibet as an additional form of control and surveillance over the Tibetan population.” On May 26, at a speech at the George Washington University, the Secretary said, “We stand together [with allies and partners] on Tibet, where the authorities continue to wage a brutal campaign against Tibetans and their culture, language, and religious traditions.”

On July 6, on the occasion of the Dalai Lama's 88th birthday, the Secretary of State issued a statement saying, "The United States is unwavering in our commitment to support the linguistic, cultural, and religious identity of Tibetans, including the ability to freely choose and venerate their religious leaders without interference." The Special Coordinator also participated in an NGO-hosted celebration of the Dalai Lama's birthday in Washington, DC.

On July 9, the Special Coordinator met with the Dalai Lama and the CTA in New Delhi, India, to discuss issues pertaining to Tibet and Tibetans, including efforts toward resuming formal dialogue with the PRC.

In February and October, Department of State officials including the Special Coordinator and Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom issued statements calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Tibetan monk, writer, and educator Go Sherab Gyatso.

In November, at an event at the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance Ministerial Conference in Prague, Czech Republic, the Special Coordinator stated, "The PRC's interference in Tibetan Buddhism...aligns with broader PRC efforts to reshape the global human rights discourse, especially regarding the right to freedom of religion or belief."

On December 11, on the occasion of Human Rights Day, the Ambassador issued a statement saying, "We condemn the PRC's human rights abuses against Tibetans and its brutal campaign to eliminate Tibet's unique cultural, linguistic, and ethnic identity."

Although U.S. officials were unable to travel to the TAR during the year, they maintained contact with a wide range of religious leaders and practitioners to monitor the status of religious freedom.