

RACIAL DISCRIMINATION in TIBET



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The Tibetan people have been suffering all kinds of human rights abuses and racial discrimination in their own country. The Chinese Constitution and the Law on Ethnic Regional Autonomy states that the 'TAR' (Tibetan Autonomous Region) "enjoys the extensive rights of autonomy, involving legislation, the use of local spoken and written languages, the administration of personnel, the economy, finance, education and culture, the management and development of natural resources, and other aspects."

In 1981, China formally agreed to abide by international law, under the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), that prohibits any distinction, exclusion or preference based on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origins.

Despite these legal guarantees, the Tibetans, who are defined as a racial minority by the People's Republic of China, face discrimination on racial grounds in all sectors of life.

Systematic discrimination in the spheres of health, education, employment, education, housing and public representation continues to restrict Tibetan involvement in the development of their own country, and has denigrated Tibetan status in society to the point of their being seen as second-class citizens by virtue of their race alone. The injustices and inequalities enforced in Tibet will soon be irrevocable if immediate action is not taken. Action that needs to redress the discrimination the Tibetan people face, before Chinese-occupied Tibet becomes the graveyard for an entire nation.

EMPLOYMENT

Population transfer of the Chinese into Tibet remains one of the greatest threats regarding employment. There has been a huge influx of Chinese due to incentives such as higher wages, longer holidays, tax exemptions and

better pension and investment terms.

In addition to these advantages for the Chinese, discrimination occurs in a wide range of areas to the detriment of Tibetans. The majority of refugees report that employers demand Chinese fluency regardless of the job. Tibetans experience prejudice, only being offered menial jobs as they are perceived as backward, and often on the condition they curtail Tibetan cultural practices in their private lives. To obtain jobs, bribery is common and the only way to combat the Chinese system of connections that secures jobs and permits as Chinese own the majority of private enterprise and hold all key positions of power.

Tibetans often have to pay for business permits, from which the Chinese are exempted and put down large deposits to get loans which, again, for Chinese are not required. Even then Tibetan traders are subject to Chinese being allocated the best shop locations and suffer from commercial copying and underselling to try and drive them out of business. Farmers are often forced to trade with the government for lower than market prices intensifying rural poverty and families are expected to supply workers for compulsory labour for development projects, which often do not benefit Tibetans. Discrimination is also evident in the salary earned by Chinese and Tibetans doing the same job. Nortso, 29, testified in January 2000 that in road construction in Ngamring County in Shigatse Prefecture Tibetans were paid 15-25 yuan a day in comparison to the Chinese wage of 40-80 yuan. In telecommunications office construction, he received only 10 yuan a day, with the Chinese receiving 50 yuan.

HEALTHCARE

China's White Paper on Human Rights in February 2000 states all citizens in China enjoy "free medical services and a labour protection medical care system at public expense". However refugees testify to being charged for all medical services, often in a discriminatory manner. Many speak of being overcharged for medicines and the prescription of expired or incorrect medicines to illiterate nomads. Tibetans incurring injuries resulting from activities deemed "political" by the authorities are also refused care.

Tibetan patients also have to pay a deposit for hospital admittance, which can vary between 2,000 to 5,000 yuan. Though refundable, the deposit is prohibitive in many cases. In 1998, 5,000 yuan was five times the annual net income of the rural Tibetan population, and equal to the per capita disposable income of urban residents. Numerous reports tell of non-payment resulting in no admittance and subsequent death due to non-treatment, whereas Chinese patients pay no deposit at all.

The issue of most concern is the violation of the reproductive rights of Tibetan women. All Tibetans regardless of their region, age or employment are subject to strict birth controls to fulfil official quotas. This is of particular importance, as Tibetans need large families to survive in a rural climate. Women with two children are forced to undergo sterilisation, the operations often being very poor and causing deaths in some cases. Tibetan women also have forced abortions routinely carried out as late as in the 7th or 8th month of pregnancy, often without anaesthetic. Faced with huge fines or other severe consequences, this is often their only choice. This is in spite of the fact that the level of infant mortality among Tibetan children is three times that of mainland China. Chinese women are also subject to birth control, but given the low density of the Tibetan population and the fact that their growth rate falls below the targets set by the government, this can only be viewed as discrimination and an intention to commit genocide.

EDUCATION

The vast majority of Tibetan children do not have the chance to attend school for more than a few years before having to leave due to exorbitant school fees, discrimination in favour of Chinese students or simply because they cannot follow the teachings in Chinese language. Numerous reports confirm Tibetan students being denied access to better schools and higher education because the places are reserved for Chinese or Tibetans working for the government. Chinese students also receive preferential teaching in class.

China itself acknowledges that 30 per cent of school aged Tibetan children don't receive any education (independent organisations put this figure at 40 percent), compared to only 1.5 percent of Chinese children. This is mainly due to prohibitively high school fees charged by the Chinese authorities "inapplicable" to Chinese students. Students also report Tibetans must also obtain higher pass marks than Chinese students and bribery as a common practice to secure future places.

Further discrimination occurs with special funding for Chinese schools, whereas in rural areas (where more than 88% of Tibetan families live) the communities are forced to construct and finance education at their own expense. Curriculums are culturally biased and exams have questions on ideology and politics. The 'TAR' authorities have stated openly that "the essence of educational work is to cultivate qualified constructors and successors for the socialist cause, and this is the sole basic mission of minority nationality education." Also, children are constantly indoctrinated about the greatness of Chinese Communist leaders.

The Convention of the Rights of the Child recognises that the purpose of education is to allow a child to develop their own ideas or perceptions. However, Tibetan children are forbidden to wear Tibetan clothes and ob-

serve Tibetan holidays while in school. It's often implicitly taught that Tibetan people are inferior to Chinese and the Tibetan tradition is backward.

Monasteries and nunneries are the only institutions that provide opportunity for children to be educated in Tibetan language, culture and religion. Under China's 'Strike Hard' campaign launched in April 1996, children below 16 have been prohibited from joining any religious institution. Over 3,000 novice nuns and monks below 18, already admitted, have been expelled to date.

HOUSING

In an effort to accommodate the huge influx of Chinese immigrants, urban centres have undergone massive architectural transformation and many Tibetans now live in fear of eviction, demolition and homelessness.

Discrimination occurs as Chinese settlers are guaranteed housing on arrival in Lhasa and there is widespread corruption in the offices that allocate accommodation. New information is kept within Chinese circles so the Tibetan public has no knowledge of new housing on offer, and the rents then charged are often too high to be affordable.

Numerous Tibetans state arbitrary eviction from their premises because the building was deemed "unsafe" or it failed to meet the Chinese standards of "beauty". Many who receive no compensation, are relocated to smaller block apartments with higher rents, or are even sent back to their native villages. An extensive survey found the new buildings to be inferior in terms of size, water, drainage, electricity and sewage facilities to the traditional Tibetan dwellings they replaced.

Discriminatory distribution of housing funds to the Chinese means they enjoy better facilities such as water, electricity and proper sanitation which are denied to Tibetans. In combination with the housing allocation system it

results in a residential segregation of more basic Tibetan quarters dwarfed by newer, larger quarters for the Chinese. The situation is even worse for rural Tibetans with more than 70% of all housing subsidies directed to urban areas in the 'TAR'. Further, the government discriminates against Tibetans by heavily restricting the movement of rural Tibetan people to the cities while allowing non resident Chinese migrants to move in freely. Also, Tibetans are subject to constant resident permit checks, to which the Chinese are not.

PUBLIC REPRESENTATION

Although 48 percent of the officials who run the regional or higher level departments in the 'TAR' are Tibetans, this is not indicative of a representative government body. Great care is taken to ensure that all Tibetans employed are "politically clean" – clean from any idea opposed to the Party's policies. China confers upon Tibetans the right to vote and elect the 'TAR's' leaders, but Tibetan people cannot put forward their own candidates. All candidates are pre-determined by Chinese authorities, and they are either Party members or pro-China.

Officials are forbidden to support the Dalai Lama or any pro-independence activity. They must agree with the Chinese version of Tibetan history and even in one county one must not have any relatives who are monks or nuns. Despite these controls, officials are still subject to arbitrary home searches and Chinese "watchers" at work who scrutinise their decisions. Chinese is the only language spoken in official positions in the 'TAR', disabling the majority of Tibetans from accessing and being involved in political affairs.

Committees set up at the village and neighbourhood level to solve disputes have been used to control Tibetans at the grassroots level and coerce them on to the socialist road, while the police often commit many of the atrocities

violating human rights. Thus, the Tibetan people have no avenue to complain to or fight the discrimination they experience in the areas described above. The selective approach assures Chinese authorities no opposition in the "TAR" government and denies the Tibetan people their right to autonomy at any level. This façade is nothing but a puppet for the Chinese government.

POPULATION TRANSFER

The massive state-encouraged population transfer into Tibet is not only infringing on the Tibetans' rights, but also threatening the survival of the Tibetan people and their unique culture.

Apart from providing a new area in which to settle the growing Chinese population, the transfer has been used to weaken Tibetan resistance and control dissidents, according to Communist Party documents.

Tibetans are now a minority in their own country. Estimates from the Tibetan Government-in-Exile put the population at around six million Tibetans living in Tibet, compared to 7.5 million non-Tibetans. This disparity is constantly increasing as refugees flee Tibet and Chinese migrants continue to pour in. Chinese people dominate in commercial, political and social life in Tibet, and outnumber Tibetans in prefectures and counties outside the "TAR". The population in Lhasa city has increased from 30,000 in 1959 to approximately 200,000 today, sixty to seventy per cent of this total is estimated to be Chinese.

N.B. For more detailed information on any area covered in this publication see "Racial Discrimination in Tibet" TCHRD September 2000.