



General Assembly

Distr.: General
11 June 2012

English only

Human Rights Council

Twentieth session

Agenda item 4

Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by International Educational Development, Inc., a non-governmental organization on the roster

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

[4 June 2012]

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

Tibetan children's right to education in the People's Republic of China**

Overview

International Educational Development and the Association of Humanitarian Lawyers are deeply concerned about education of Tibetans in the People's Republic of China (PRC). International law recognizes and respects the right to education as a fundamental right of every child. The Constitution and the 1986 PRC's law on "Compulsory education" enshrine free nine years compulsory education for all nationalities.

In reality, however, education is still unavailable and inaccessible to vast majority of Tibetans in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR)¹. At a 1994 conference on Education, the Chairman of TAR, Gyaltsen Norbu, acknowledged that "one third of Children in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) cannot afford to go to school." According to the United Nations Development Programs Report of 2005, the Tibetan Autonomous Region had the highest overall illiteracy rates of all PRC provinces. The national average is 10.3 per cent while the illiteracy rate in the TAR is 44 per cent. The quality of teachers and standard of education in Tibetan areas continues to be low and the children of nomads and farmers have difficulty in obtaining access to education².

Because of the poor education system in the TAR, every year hundreds of Tibetan children risk their lives to escape to India to be educated in the Tibetan refugee schools. For example, the Tibetan Children's Village School system has an enrolment of about 17,000 students, almost half escapees.

Bilingual education

In the TAR, bilingual education has generated "subtractive" bilingualism, where young Tibetan children learn Chinese language at the expense of Tibetan language.³

The Chinese authorities often present their concept of bilingual education as a progressive educational policy that confirms their commitment to 'protecting' minority culture and languages⁴. At the same time, many Tibetans also view bilingual education positively, since it provides space for Tibetan language in the education system.

However, in reality, the large number of demonstrations by Tibetan students demanding for language rights in the school, illustrates the double standard of China's propaganda of bilingual education. Moreover, China's provision of "teaching the Chinese language in the basic education phase" appears that the concept of bilingualism is reduced to providing Chinese language education for those Chinese is a second language rather than being an education system genuinely based on two languages.

Restriction on Tibetan language in schools

International law projects the vitality of language not only in the view of [re]production of cultural identities, but also as a fundamental medium to express opinions and thoughts.

** The Association of Humanitarian Lawyers, an NGO without consultative status, also shares the views expressed in this statement.

¹ Annual Report, 2005, Tibetan Center For Democracy and Human Rights pg. 158

² Tibet Watch Special Report, August 2007

³ <http://faceoftibet.com/2012/04/29/tibetan-language-a-case-of-intentionally-endangered-language/> accessed on May 2012

⁴ http://eng.tibet.cn/2010jy/zyjy/201102/t20110215_923966.html

http://eng.tibet.cn/2010jy/xw/201205/t20120504_1739570.htm

Recognising that, freedom to use and develop minority languages is guaranteed by Article 53 of the PRC's constitution and its 1995 Education law. However, on the ground, Tibetan language is dropped either completely or retained only as a language subject. As reported in the United State Department report (2010) in Dartsedo (in Chinese: Kangding), Karze Prefecture, there are no elementary schools where Tibetans could study in Tibetan⁵. In middle and high schools, including some officially designated as Tibetan schools, Tibetan is taught as a language subject only.

In March 2012, the New York Time's Beijing-based reporter Andrew Jacobs travelled to Tibetan areas in Machu in north-eastern Tibet (incorporated into China's Gansu province) to investigate the case of Tsering Kyi, a 20-year-old student at the Tibetan Middle School in Machu who set herself on fire. Jacobs believes one significant factor which led to the spate of protests and self-immolation in Tibet is the change from Tibetan to Chinese as the current language of instruction in Tibetan schools⁶.

In October 2010, thousands of Tibetan students from six different schools in Rebkong (in Chinese: Tongren) in north-eastern Tibet (Qinghai province) protested against the Chinese government's educational policy to implement Chinese language as the medium of instruction in all the primary schools by 2015. The protest later spread to other Tibetan areas such as Chabcha in Tsolho (in Chinese: Hainan), where hundreds of Tibetan students called for equality for nationalities and equality for language. Hundreds of Tibetan teachers signed a petition in support of the student protests, demanding that the authorities respect the right of minorities to use and propagate language.

On 4 March 2012, nearly 700 students staged a protest in Rebkong for language rights. Students of the school marched into town after they discovered that their new textbooks for politics, history, geography, mathematics, biology, chemistry and physics, which were previously in Tibetan, were made in Chinese.

In Tibet, a protest for language rights are viewed as "national sentiment" and thus severely suppressed by arresting students and forcibly closing the schools.

Tibetans seeking higher education face discrimination because course work in Tibetan is not given full weight and sometimes no weight in collage examinations⁷. Tibetan language and grammar books are disparaged, labeled "books of blind faith."

Tibetan schools forcibly closed down

The survival of a distinct culture and identity primarily relies on the state recognition and the freedom to protect and promote that particular language. Schools play a crucial role in protecting and promoting the language. However, schools aimed to teach and promote Tibetan language are forcibly sealed off and Teachers are arbitrarily arrest under fake "separatist" charges. In May 2012, a Tibetan orphanage school in Kanlho (Gansu Province, which housed 50 students, was forcibly closed down on charges of giving priority to the Tibetan language and culture⁸. Two of its teachers were arrested. In April 2012, The Chinese authorities forcibly closed a school established to teach and promote Tibetan culture and language (Karze County, Eastern Tibet, Sichuan Province) and ordered the parents to send students to government schools where only Chinese education is provided.⁹

⁵ 2010 State Department Report on Human Rights available in <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/eap/154382.htm>.

⁶ Article available in <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/23/world/asia/in-self-immolations-signs-of-new-turmoil-in-tibet.html?pagewanted=all>.

⁷ A/HRC/16/NGO/136 , 8 March 2011.

⁸ <http://www.tibettimes.net/news.php?showfooter=1&id=6009>.

⁹ http://www.tchrd.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=211:tibetan-school-forcibly-closed-teachers-arrested&catid=70:2012-news&Itemid=162.

During the closure, the authorities detained a head master and a teacher Nyendak, 51 and Yama Tsering 36; three other teachers, who were away from school at the time of the shutdown order, were warned against coming back.

As reported by Voice of Tibet radio service January 2010, the Chinese authorities forcefully shut down an intermediate school and an elementary school in Machu County. The schools planned to hold a jointly seminar on Tibetan language entitled "Bhoemi Kyiduk Nyamnyongm" meaning "Tibetan people's happiness and suffering to be experienced together," a slogan of the student protests in 2008. The authorities closed down the schools due to the nature of the seminar and that it would attract large number of Tibetans.

In April 2008, The Chinese authorities of Ngaba closed down a school run by the Taksang Lhamo Kirit Monastery, citing the "student's participation in the protest"¹⁰. The school faced constant intervention from the Chinese authorities. At the time of its closure, the school housed 504 novice monks and lay children from neighbouring areas.

Education or indoctrination

Article 26.2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms." The slender educational opportunities that exist for Tibetan children are categorically designed to foster a sense of nationhood rather than to develop children's personality, talents and mental abilities. According to Educational Minister Zhou Ji, the primary goal of minority education policy is to strengthen the communist ideology¹¹. A report by Human Rights in China entitled *China: Minority Exclusion, Marginalization and Rising Tensions* indicates that Tibetan children are subjected to an educational system systematically designed to deny them opportunity and ability to learn their own histories and language and to indoctrinate them. Successful lies in how strongly students turn away from the Dalai Lama. The best students are removed from Tibet and placed in schools teaching exclusively in Chinese. Thus, Tibet loses those most able to engage in the development of Tibet and its culture.

Recommendations

We urge the Special Rapporteur on education to look into the situation of Tibetan school children in the PRC, especially in the TAR.

We urge the PRC:

- to respect the right of Tibetan children to receive education as enshrined in the international treaties and PRC constitution;
- to suspend any program that restricts or removes the usage of Tibetan language in schools in Tibetan areas;
- to allow the Tibetan to have say in setting school curriculum and contents of text books;
- to provide education with an aim to develop each child's full potential.

¹⁰ <http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?id=20731&t=1>
<http://www.tibetanreview.net/news.php?cat=22&cp=259&&id=291>.

¹¹ Speech by Zhou Ji, Minister of Education Press conference sponsored by the State Council Information Office.