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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

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

[11 February 2013]

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

Restrictions on the freedom of religion or belief in the Tibet Autonomous Region and other Tibetan-populated areas of China

Not only is the freedom of thought, conscience and religion enshrined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights - the freedom of religion and belief is also specifically provided for in the Constitution of the People's Republic of China and the Law on Regional National Autonomy. In practice, however, policies blatantly contrary to this law are applied in Tibetan areas. The Chinese government has repressed the practice of Tibetan Buddhism with intense regulation of, and control over, religious institutions. Since the protests of March 2008 this repression has intensified, taking the form of interference in the government of monasteries, imposition of "patriotic education" programmes on monks and nuns, deployment of military and police personnel in and around monasteries, arbitrary detentions following night raids under "Strike Hard" campaigns, and direct interference with some aspects of religious observance.

Under a set of "management measures for the reincarnation of Living Buddhas in Tibetan Buddhism" outlined by the State Administration of Religious Affairs in 2007, "Democratic Management Committees" were formed in all monasteries. These work teams now exercise complete authority over management of monasteries.

In March 2012, Human Rights Watch reported that the autonomy of the monasteries was to be further curtailed, with henceforth "every monastery in Tibet [...] under the direct rule of government officials who will be permanently stationed in each religious institution.". Restrictions are being placed on the numbers who may become monks and nuns, and on the orders of the authorities hundreds of monks were expelled from Kirti monastery in March 2011.

"Patriotic (re-)education" was originally launched in 1996 as a five-year programme "Love your Country, Love your Religion." Since then monks and nuns have been subjected to an increasing intensity of such programmes, during which they are obliged to pledge their allegiance to the Chinese government, denouncing His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Those who refuse to take part in, or fail, the programme often have their right to practise as monks or nuns revoked.

Since November 2011, under the "Nine Must Haves" programme, all Tibetan monasteries have been required to hang the portraits of Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, together with the Chinese national flag. Meanwhile, possessing an "image" of the Dalai Lama is illegal in the TAR, and in September 2012, the Chinese authorities in Rebkong (Chinese: Tongren) County issued a notice banning photographs of the Dalai Lama.

The most recent metamorphosis of such programmes is under the title of "Legal Education". On 11th May 2012, the TAR Government called a "Mobilization Meeting on in-depth Legal Education Campaign in Tibetan Buddhist Temples" in the interests of "maintaining stability, enhancing unity and promoting harmony" in Tibet. It was announced that following intensive "re-education" in November 2011, "law-abiding advanced monks and nuns of the harmonious monasteries" would receive free pension and medical insurance and an annual free health check.

Self-Immolations

The wave of self-immolations which started on 27th February 2009, and to which we drew attention in our last statement on this issue,¹ continued and grew in 2012. By 10th January 2013, the total number of instances had reached 97, more than half of whom were, or had once been, monks or nuns – this illustrating the extent to which the immolations were triggered by the specifically religious aspects of the repression of Tibetans. Of the 97, 81 are known to have died; the fate of 14 remains unknown.

The immolations have also sparked a wave of protests in monasteries across all Tibetan areas, which have been met by a strong official crackdown. There are many reports of monks and nuns who have been detained and are being held incommunicado; it is impossible to ascertain what the total number might be.

Enforced or involuntary disappearance

On May 14, 1995, His Holiness the Dalai Lama announced the six-year-old Gedun Choekyi Nyima as the true reincarnation of the 10th Panchen Lama, who is regarded as one of the highest lamas within the Gelugpa tradition. Three days after the announcement, Gedun Choekyi Nyima and his family disappeared and have not been seen in public since. The Chinese authorities have failed to provide adequate information in response to concerns regarding the fate and whereabouts of Gedun Choekyi Nyima expressed by the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, by the Special Rapporteur on the Freedom of Religion or Belief, and by the Committee on Rights of Child.

Alleged torture and inhuman treatment while in detention

Trulku Tenzin Delek Rinpoche has now been incarcerated for more than ten years, a death sentence on ill-substantiated charges of involvement in a series of bomb blast incidents in Sichuan Province and of "incitement to separatism" having been commuted to life imprisonment. Recent reports indicate that, although he is ill with a heart ailment and a leg injury allegedly sustained through torture during interrogation, the prison authorities have denied his request for a medical checkup.

Arbitrary detentions

Following the self-immolations of monks Chime Palden (age 21), and Tenpa Dhargyal, (22) on 12th August, 2012, five monks were detained during a night raid on Gyalrong Tsodun Monastery in Barkham (Chinese: Maerkang) County, Ngaba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan province, namely Lobsang Sangay (19); Yarphe (18), Namsay (18), Thupwang Tenzin (20) and Asong (22). Their current whereabouts remain unknown.

On 19th August, 2012, Lobsang Rabten (34), an official with the Monastery Management Committee of the same Monastery, was detained. The location and reason for his detention are unknown.

Enhanced security presence

Since 2011, a policy has been instituted of installing a police post in each monastery and at each Tibetan cluster (village) in the TAR. So far 676 new police posts have been created, including 135 in Lhasa and 150 in Chamdo prefecture (50 in Chamdo town). The expansion of the network to other areas is in progress.

¹ A/HRC/20/NGO/59.

In Lhasa, close to 200 closed-circuit TV cameras have been installed. Moreover, following the two self-immolations in Lhasa on 27th May 2012 the entire Tibetan quarter in Lhasa has been brought under increased surveillance. It is reported that at least 10 metal detector doors have now been installed at each entry point to the Barkhor district and the Tsuglhakhang Buddhist temple. Four have been installed at the entrance to Potala palace.

Restrictions on access to Lhasa interfere with the freedom of Tibetans to make pilgrimages to the many sacred monasteries and other sites in the city. In order to enter Lhasa, all Tibetan non-residents, even if originally from counties within the Lhasa municipality, have to provide five separate documents – a confirmation, from a hotel or landlord, of their address in the city; a certificate issued by the local neighbourhood committee; the *hukou* (household registration) issued by their birthplace, together with a letter of introduction and a guarantee showing no criminal records; an Identity Card; and a temporary residence permit for Lhasa. Monks and nuns must also have a certificate confirming their status and even after obtaining all the required documents, it is extremely difficult for them to enter or to remain in Lhasa.

Direct interference with religious observances

In the name of "national security and national unity", the Tibetan Autonomous Region Committee for Discipline Inspection and Supervision Department has issued an order banning Party members, cadres, government officials and students from participating in any religious activities, especially those marking the sacred month of Saka Dawa.

Chinese authorities have barred the monastic community of Ngoshul Monastery, Ngaba Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province from offering condolences and prayer rituals for three of its monks namely Dorjee (15), Samdup (16) and Dorjee Kyab (16), who self-immolated on 7th November, 2012.

Recommendations

Through the Human Rights Council, the International Fellowship Of Reconciliation urges China:

- To respect the Tibetan people's freedom of religion, belief and practice, in accordance with its own Constitution and laws on Regional National Autonomy;
- To allow international media, foreign diplomats and UN independent experts unfettered access to all Tibetan populated regions;
- To immediately withdraw security personnel from the Ngaba, Kardze, Kanlho, Rebkong and Chamdo regions of Tibet and from individual monasteries;
- To end patriotic re-education in monasteries and allow monks and nuns freely to practice their Buddhist philosophy;
- To provide information on the fate and whereabouts of those arrested or otherwise detained following their actual or alleged participation in protests;
- To resume dialogue with His Holiness the Dalai Lama or his envoys to find mutually agreeable solutions to longstanding political problems;
- To release Trulku Tenzin Delek Rinpoche immediately, in view of his medical condition;
- To grant unconditional release to all prisoners held on political charges.