

# TIBET AT A TURNING POINT

## THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN TIBET AND TIBET'S CHINA POLICY

Since March 10, 2008, the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) has documented over 125 protests. The map on page 47 shows the location of Tibetan protests.<sup>1</sup>

With the exception of the March 14 protests in Lhasa, the protests were non-violent. Tibetans in Tibet have risked their lives and safety throughout the past months to express their fundamental discontent with policies imposed by Beijing—with the clear message that their exiled leader, the Dalai Lama, and not the Chinese state, represents their interests.

However, the Tibetan people's non-violent expression of their situation was met by a violent crackdown by the Chinese authorities. ICT has learned from reliable sources from the field that around 100 Tibetans were killed in Lhasa, the capital city, and nearby areas during the crackdown from March 14 onwards. In other Tibetan areas, around 40 people were shot dead or have died as a result of the crackdown.<sup>2</sup> The crackdown led to a climate of intense fear and despair all over the Tibetan Plateau.

Sources in Tibet have also revealed that Chinese security forces took possession of the bodies of those who were killed, in order to destroy any eventual evidence of the manner of death. ICT, while monitoring the aftermath of protests, received several reports that large numbers of such bodies were disposed of in a new crematorium at Yabda (in Chinese, Yangda [羊达]) Township in the Toelung (in Chinese, Duilong [堆龙]) Valley.

In order to verify the conditions of Tibetan people with the relevant authorities of the People's Republic of China (hereafter the PRC), ICT submitted a report to the UN

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**By Vincent Metten**

Committee Against Torture (CAT) at its 41st session, during which the Committee reviewed the PRC's Fourth Periodic Report.<sup>3</sup>

In Tibet, ICT has confirmed that new measures have been implemented to purge monasteries of monks and nuns and ban worship in the wake of the protests. These include measures created specifically to cause public humiliation or extreme mental anguish among the monastic

community, revealing a systematic new attack on Tibetan Buddhism led by Chinese Party Secretary and President Hu Jintao. In an edict reminiscent of the Cultural Revolution, an order from the People's Government of Garze (also "Kardze"; in Chinese, Ganzi [甘孜]) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture states that the rooms of monks and nuns who refuse to be registered or who do not conform to the demands of political education will be demolished, and the monks and nuns expelled. The above-mentioned measures as well as other information received from the ground totally contradict the content of the newly released Chinese *White Paper on Protection and Development of Tibetan Culture*.

In addition, China has taken all possible measures to impose an information blackout on the Tibetan plateau. In areas of Tibet where protests took place, authorities confiscated cell phones and computers, turned off cellular transmission facilities, and interfered with Internet access.

According to news reported on Tibet's XZTV in September 2008, the "Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) government will do anything to keep all border areas under control, and border troops and the People's Armed Police will be provided with special equipment, such as tents and communications equipment, that works in ex-

tremely cold environments.” This may indicate severe ongoing restrictions on Tibet’s border areas, which continue to remain sealed off from the outside world. Similarly, TAR Vice Party Secretary Hao Peng told security forces during his visit to the border region in September that the objective was to “hold their ground at all border passes.” He added, “The political stability in the TAR is facing a new stage. . . . We must continue to obey the Party’s orders . . . and determinedly fight in order to defeat the Dalai clique’s political scheme.”<sup>4</sup>

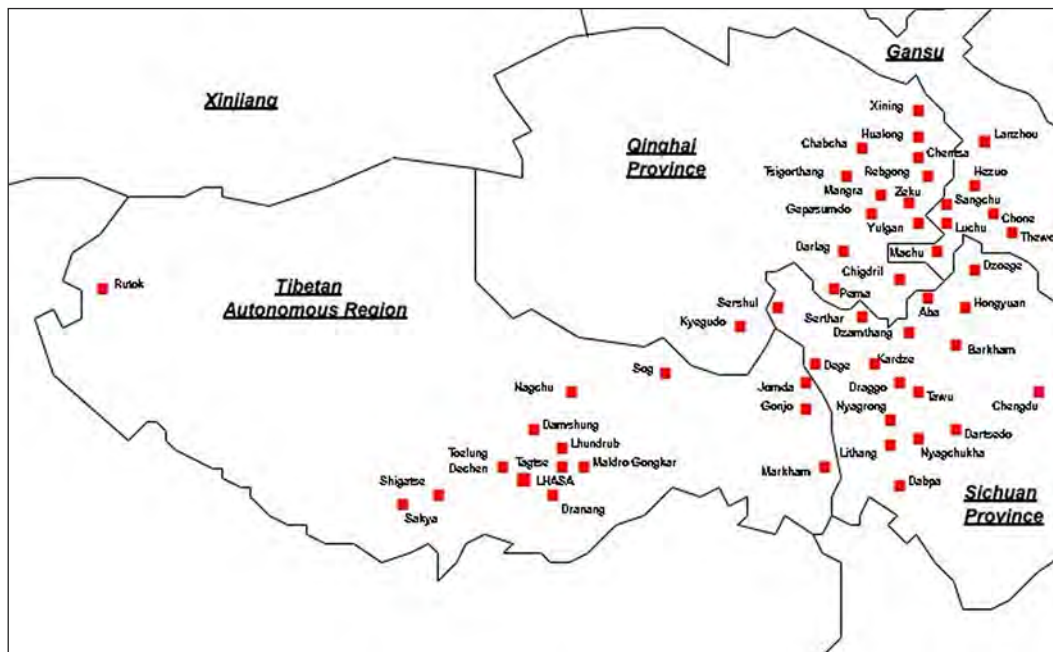
It is unsurprising, therefore, that since March 2008, only a very limited number of Tibetans could cross the Himalaya and transit via the Reception Center in Kathmandu. In “normal times,” according to ICT’s 2006 Refugee Report, between 200 and 300 Tibetans each month make the dangerous journey through the Himalayas, in particular during the winter, when it is more difficult for Chinese patrols to monitor high altitude passes.<sup>5</sup>

However, the severe restrictions do not apply to domestic tour groups, which have been allowed into Tibet since late April, followed by visitors from Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. As of June 20, the CCTV.com web-

site confirmed that the region had received more than 160 tour groups. According to one Chinese source close to ICT who was in Lhasa recently, there are reports that many Chinese tourists were distressed due to the repressive atmosphere and heavy military presence, and said that they would never go back to Tibet.<sup>6</sup> Today in Lhasa, streets are saturated with army personnel. A Taiwanese American who was able to travel to Garze during the Olympics said that the region was like a “war zone.”

As for the foreigners, only a limited number of foreign tourists, journalists, or official delegations are allowed—under certain conditions and strict control—access to Lhasa and the rest of Tibet. But given the high restrictions in Tibet, foreigners would be in a difficult position to see the reality that Tibetans are experiencing every day. For example, Norwegian Foreign Secretary Raymond Johansen was able to visit Tibet around the end of October 2008, but only when he agreed to travel without a Norwegian press corps. He was not given a reason as to why reporters were not allowed to accompany him into Tibet.

Tibetans are still unable to travel freely within Tibet and many are not ready to risk their lives to cross the Himalayas.



Squares on the map indicate counties or cities (eg., Lhasa, Xining, Lanzhou, Hezuo) where protests have taken place. Within a county there may have been numerous protests in different villages or monasteries. Sites compiled from various sources where protests are reported to have taken place since March 10, 2008. Map credit: Tashi D. Lek and [www.savetibet.org](http://www.savetibet.org).

In such an environment, have the protests on the Tibetan Plateau had any impact on China's Tibet Policy? Chinese authorities have made a rare admission that large-scale migration from China, particularly linked to the opening of the Qinghai-Tibet railway in 2006, may have been a factor in triggering the unrest in Lhasa in March.<sup>7</sup>

But so far, China's overall Tibet policy has not been reviewed or changed despite the fundamental discontent of the Tibetan population with the policies imposed by Beijing.

In Tibet, there is increasing evidence of ethnic tension between Tibetan and Chinese people, partly because of misinformation and propaganda by the Chinese authorities. An official notice seen in two different regions stated that every hotel and public bathhouse is required to check on the "circumstances" of all Tibetan and Uyghur visitors, and that their presence should be reported to local police. This official acknowledgement that Tibetans and Uyghurs are under suspicion simply because of their ethnicity is supported by numerous anecdotal and eyewitness reports of new discrimination against Tibetans and a breakdown in communications between Chinese and Tibetan colleagues in different workplaces, including at government meetings.<sup>8</sup>

A two-month ultimatum ran out in mid-September for Tibetan Party and government workers who sent their children to study in schools run by the government in exile in India. In July, Communist Party authorities in the TAR issued measures stating that Tibetan children must confess if they have been to schools in India and whether they believed anything they had been taught there. This latter measure stated that if Tibetans did not follow the ruling, they would be expelled from their jobs, and their children would lose their rights to residence permits if they did not return to Tibet within a specified time. According to *Tibet Daily*, the new regulations are an essential element of "the struggle against splittism."<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, according to official media, in October 2008, Sichuan provincial authorities plan to spend 5 billion *yuan* (US \$731 million) to settle 470,000 Tibetan herders in permanent houses.<sup>10</sup> It is surprising that of-

ficial state media has acknowledged such a high figure. The policy to resettle nomads in towns and villages is a serious threat to the way of life that is an integral part of Tibetan identity, as well as the livelihoods of Tibetan nomads.

The official Xinhua News Agency has also announced the Chinese government's intention to increase extraction of natural resources, and that it will spend 3.1 billion *yuan* (US \$453 million) by 2013 on a series of industrial schemes, including ten mining projects and five industrial zones. The Chinese government has also expressed its intention to build more than 750 hydroelectric power stations across Tibet to boost the region's electricity supply. Accordingly, Beijing is determined to dam many of Tibet's rivers and lakes despite concerns about the local environment and about the effect the projects will have on neighbouring countries. In the past, Tibetans have opposed many of the projects, in particular, the project to dam the holy Yamdrok Yumtso (in Chinese, Yangzhuo Yongcuo [羊卓雍錯]), or Scorpion Lake, south of Lhasa.

More information about the resettlements of nomads and the exploitation of natural resources can be found in ICT's report *Tracking the Steel Dragon*.<sup>11</sup>

## THE FUTURE OF THE TIBET QUESTION

### Special Meeting on November 17–22, 2008

On September 21, 2008, His Holiness the Dalai Lama approved the proposal of the Kashag [the advisory board of the Tibetan government-in-exile] and the Tibetan Parliament for a Special Meeting of the Tibetan community in exile to consider the situation inside Tibet, the status of the dialogue with China, and the broader international situation. This Special Meeting, which took place on November 17–22, 2008, in Dharamsala, India, was the first to be convened under the Tibetan Charter (article 59). The Dalai Lama said on this meeting, "I have asked the Tibetan Government in exile, as a true democracy in exile, to decide in consultation with the Tibetan people the future course of action."<sup>12</sup>

Representatives to this special meeting included cur-

rent and former members of the Tibetan Parliament and of the Kashag, senior officials of the Tibetan Administration, envoys and representatives of the Dalai Lama, representatives of the Tibetan refugee settlements in India and Nepal, representatives of Tibetan NGOs, heads of Tibetan schools, and others.

[For a report on the Special Meeting by a private delegate, see “Notes From Dharamsala: HRIC Conversation with Yodon Thonden” in this issue.]

### The Sino-Tibetan Dialogue

Since 2002, seven official rounds of talks have taken place between representatives of the Dalai Lama and the Chinese government. Lodi Gyari, the Special Envoy of the Dalai Lama, explained the current status of the discussion in an address on October 8, 2008, at the Harvard University Kennedy School of Government.

During the sixth round of talks in June–July 2007, Gyari said, the Chinese position changed and hardened. Chinese authorities had tried to change the very framework of the discussions by saying there was no Tibet issue and that the only issue was that of the personal welfare of the Dalai Lama. But for the Tibetan delegation, the core issue is the welfare of the Tibetan people and not the personal status and affairs of the Dalai Lama.

The seventh round of talks took place in July 2008, one month before the Beijing Olympic Games. Gyari said that the Tibetan delegation suggested some possible initiatives, including the delivery of a joint statement confirming the commitment of both sides to the dialogue process. In contrast, the Chinese side failed to agree to this proposal.

But one constructive outcome of the seventh round was the willingness of the Chinese government to “receive suggestions from the Tibetan side relating to the stability and development of Tibet and specific ideas on all aspects of regional autonomy within the framework of the PRC Constitution,” said Gyari.

The message Gyari expressed in early October 2008 at Harvard University regarding the eighth and next

round of talks was very clear: “If during this upcoming round there is no perceptible change in the attitude of the Chinese leadership, then, as I have already made it clear to my counterparts, we may be compelled to conclude that this is a confirmation of their lack of seriousness and sincerity in the dialogue process.” He added, “The Dalai Lama is the most patient of leaders, but he, too, is beginning to feel concerned that his efforts are leading nowhere.”

On October 20, 2008, in Dharamsala, the Dalai Lama made an important statement about his role and Tibet’s future in which he admitted that his faith in the present Chinese government was “thinning.” The Dalai Lama confronted the Chinese government by stressing, “We cannot continue as though we do not know that this [the protests and suppression across Tibet since March] is happening.” The Dalai Lama indicated in his comments that he is prepared for the “Middle Way” approach—which accepts Chinese sovereignty over Tibet but seeks a “genuine autonomy” for the Tibetan people—to be questioned if the Tibetan people do not feel it can achieve results. He said: “Until now, we have followed a path towards finding a mutually beneficial solution which has received much support from the rest of the world including India, as well as increasingly more Chinese intellectuals. But this path has had no effect on our main objective, which is to improve the lives of Tibetans inside Tibet. . . . Now, at this time, there is no reason to stay the same course just because we are on it [now]. The future of Tibet is for the Tibetan people to decide—not for me as an individual. Secondly, I truly believe in active democracy—I am not like the Communist Chinese who say one thing, like democracy, and act in another way.”<sup>13</sup>

Some people in the Chinese Government seem to believe that the aspirations of the Tibetan people will disappear once the Dalai Lama passes away. This approach is wrong and irresponsible as China would be left to handle the problem without the presence of a leader who enjoys the loyalty of the entire community and who remains firmly committed to non-violence. After the spring events, a Tibetan from Amdo (in Chinese, Anduo [安多]) said that in such circumstances there would be a volcano-like eruption of the sentiments in Tibet. And it only takes a few desperate individuals or

groups to create major instability. This is why far from being the problem, the Dalai Lama is the solution, which should be clearly understood by Chinese leaders.

2009 is a very important commemorative year both in China and Tibet. On October 1, 2009, the Communist Party of China will celebrate the 60th anniversary of the People's Republic of China. Human rights groups and defenders will focus on the 50th anniversary of the 1959 national uprising that led to the Dalai Lama's escape from Tibet, as well as the 1st anniversary of the March 2008 demonstrations and protests which started on March 10. Next year will also mark the 20th anniversary of the events of Tiananmen on June 3–4, 1989, the repression of peaceful demonstrations in Lhasa the same year, and the imposition of the martial law in the Tibetan capital.

Tibet will therefore certainly not disappear from the world's attention and agenda in 2009.

## Notes

1. Map of protests available at [www.savetibet.org](http://www.savetibet.org).
2. International Campaign for Tibet (ICT), *Tibet at a Turning Point: The Spring Uprising and China's New Crackdown* (Washington, DC: ICT, 2008), [http://www.savetibet.org/documents/pdfs/Tibet\\_at\\_a\\_Turning\\_Point.pdf](http://www.savetibet.org/documents/pdfs/Tibet_at_a_Turning_Point.pdf).
3. ICT, *Submission to the Committee against Torture during Its Consideration of the Fourth Periodic Report of the People's Republic of China* (2008), [http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cat/docs/ngos/ICT1\\_China\\_41.pdf](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cat/docs/ngos/ICT1_China_41.pdf). Similar reports from other NGOs to the 41 CAT meetings are available at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cat/cats41.htm>.
4. Yao Wen [姚闻], "Hao Peng yaoqiu: baozheng bianjing diqu anding fazhan [郝鹏在日喀则地区调研时要求保稳定抓经济促和谐 保证边境地区安定发展]," *Tibet Daily*, September 9, 2008, [http://epaper.chinatibetnews.com/xzrb/html/2008-09/10/content\\_20058.htm](http://epaper.chinatibetnews.com/xzrb/html/2008-09/10/content_20058.htm).
5. ICT, *Dangerous Crossing: Conditions Impacting the Flight of Tibetan Refugees: 2006 Report* (Washington, DC: ICT, 2008), <http://savetibet.org/documents/document.php?id=216>.
6. ICT, *Tibet at a Turning Point: The Spring Uprising and China's New Crackdown* (Washington, DC: ICT, 2008), [http://www.savetibet.org/documents/pdfs/Tibet\\_at\\_a\\_Turning\\_Point.pdf](http://www.savetibet.org/documents/pdfs/Tibet_at_a_Turning_Point.pdf).
7. ICT, "Authorities Admit that Chinese Migration May Have Been Factor in Triggering Unrest in Tibet; Officials Inspect Construction of New Police Stations in Monasteries as Crackdown Continues," September 16, 2008, <http://savetibet.org/news/newsitem.php?id=1362>.
8. ICT, "Official Notice Evidence of Discrimination against Tibetans after Protests," October 8, 2008, <http://savetibet.org/news/newsitem.php?id=1373>.
9. ICT, "Tibetan Children due to Face Forced Confessions, Punishment for Studying in India," September 22, 2008, <http://savetibet.org/news/newsitem.php?id=1367>.
10. "470,000 Tibetan Herds People in Sichuan to Move into Brick Houses," Xinhua News Agency, October 11, 2008, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-10/11/content\\_10178779.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-10/11/content_10178779.htm).
11. ICT, *Tracking the Steel Dragon: How China's Economic Policies and the Railway Are Transforming Tibet* (Washington, DC: ICT, 2007), <http://savetibet.org/documents/pdfs/TrackingTheSteelDragon.pdf>.
12. "Dalai Lama: I've Given Up on China," Associated Press, October 27, 2008, <http://www.smh.com.au/news/world/dalai-lama-ive-given-up-on-china/2008/10/26/1224955853376.html>.
13. ICT, "Important Statement by Dalai Lama 'Speaking Truth to Power,'" October 27, 2008, <http://savetibet.org/news/newsitem.php?id=1376>.