



**Statement of Rep. James P. McGovern,
Chairman of the Congressional-Executive
Commission on China (CECC)**

**CECC Hearing on
“The Human Rights Situation in Tibet
and the International Response”**

Wednesday, September 30, 2020

Good morning and welcome to today’s hearing of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China on “The Human Rights Situation in Tibet and the International Response.”

While the world has rightly focused on the crimes against humanity, and perhaps genocide, in Xinjiang, and the dismantling of Hong Kong’s autonomy and rule of law, the human rights situation in Tibet continues to deteriorate.

More than 60 years have passed since the Dalai Lama escaped into exile and Tibetans in China are still struggling to exercise their basic human rights -- to speak and teach their language, protect their culture, control their land and water, travel within and outside their country, and practice their religion as they choose.

Religious freedom continues to be severely curtailed, including through mandatory political education for religious leaders and arrests of Tibetans who display, or even possess, a photo of the Dalai Lama.

Several buildings at religious centers of Tibetan Buddhist learning have been demolished. Religious practitioners have been expelled from Larung Gar and Yachen Gar which used to be home to thousands of Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns.

It has now been 25 years since the 11th Panchen Lama was abducted and forcibly disappeared, making him one of the world’s longest detained prisoners of conscience. We continue to call for his immediate and unconditional release.

This year, “ethnic unity” regulations were passed that mandate acceptance and promotion of government ethnic and religious policy.

There has also been a Chinese government-led effort, misleadingly referred to as “bilingual education,” instituted in minority areas throughout China that mandate schools and teachers shift to Mandarin as the language of instruction.

These violations of linguistic rights in Tibet are also being implemented in Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia, where new limits on Mongolian-language instruction recently sparked large-scale demonstrations.

In the name of “poverty alleviation” and environmental protection, Tibetan herders and nomads are under pressure to give up their traditional land rights and way of life, displaced according to the whims of government and business.

Make no mistake, Chinese authorities are engaged in a systematic effort to eliminate the distinct religious, linguistic, and cultural identity of the Tibetan people.

They are in clear violation of China’s international obligations to protect human rights and religious freedom, and to respect the rights of indigenous peoples and tribal and ethnic minorities.

Access to Tibet remains tightly controlled with journalists reporting that it is as difficult to visit Tibet as North Korea. As a result, human rights abuses and environmental degradation are concealed from the world.

In 2018, Congress passed the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act and I was heartened to finally see the Trump Administration implement this legislation by restricting visas for Chinese officials involved in blocking access to Tibetan areas.

However, a Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues has still not been appointed, as mandated by law.

Every other U.S. President of the last two decades has made this appointment. Not doing so sends a signal that the human rights of the Tibetan people are not a priority for the President or the U.S. government.

I am very concerned about recent reports that a systematic and large-scale training and transfer of Tibetan “rural surplus laborers” to work in factories is taking place. This program seems eerily similar to Uyghur forced labor abuses that have been well documented by this Commission.

I am also concerned about the targeting of the Tibetan diaspora, including such tactics as allegedly engaging a New York police officer to gather intelligence for the Chinese government about the New York Tibetan community.

I look forward to hearing more about these issues from our witnesses today.

In a white paper last year, the Chinese government restated its claim that it has the sole authority to control the next reincarnation of the Dalai Lama, in clear violation of the religious freedom of the Tibetan Buddhist community.

In light of new threats to interfere in the reincarnation process and the increased human rights violations, U.S. policy towards Tibet needs to be updated and strengthened.

In January 2020, the House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed the Tibetan Policy and Support Act by a vote of 392-22.

At a time when Democrats and Republicans can’t even agree on what to have for lunch, this bipartisanship shows overwhelming support for the human rights of Tibetans. This legislation would:

- Establish as U.S. policy that the succession or reincarnation of Tibetan Buddhist leaders, including a future 15th Dalai Lama, is an exclusively

religious matter that should be decided solely by the Tibetan Buddhist community.

- State that Chinese officials who interfere in the succession or reincarnation process will be subject to targeted sanctions, including those contained in the Global Magnitsky Act.
- Strengthen the role of the State Department Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues by including a mandate to work multilaterally.
- Mandate that no new Chinese consulates should be established in the United States until a U.S. consulate is established in Tibet.
- Direct the State Department to begin multinational efforts to protect the environment and water resources of the Tibetan Plateau.
- And support democratic governance in the Tibetan exile community.

It is long past time for the Senate to act on this legislation. Frankly, I'm not sure why it has not moved forward.

I hope my Senate colleagues, and all supporters of human rights in Tibet, will contact Republican Leader Mitch McConnell and Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Jim Risch and ask them to pass this bipartisan legislation as soon as possible.

Our hearing today will examine the current situation facing Tibetans, both inside China and globally; explore restrictions on linguistic and religious rights; and identify diplomatic and multilateral options to address restrictions on access and the process of religious succession.