ETHNIC MINORITY RIGHTS

Introduction

During the Commission’s 2014 reporting year, Chinese authorities enforced harsh restrictions and crackdowns on ethnic minorities, particularly those living in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and other Tibetan autonomous areas, the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), and the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (IMAR). Authorities tightened controls on ethnic minority advocates who sought to peacefully assert their distinct cultural, linguistic, or religious identity and who criticized state policies using methods conforming to both domestic and international law. [See Section IV—Xinjiang and Section V—Tibet for additional information on these areas.]

State Minority Policy

State measures to address ethnic minorities’ grievances remained limited in the 2014 reporting year, while authorities emphasized the role of stability and ethnic unity in promoting development in areas with large ethnic minority populations. Communist Party authorities in the XUAR and TAR assigned cadres to rural grassroots positions as part of a “mass line” campaign aimed, in part, at enhancing stability and ethnic unity. In February 2014, Zhu Weiqun, Director of the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, stated that instead of heeding Western criticism of perceived rights violations in Tibet and the XUAR, China “should be focused on its development and stability.” Official campaigns linking stability and ethnic unity with development have raised concerns over assimilative pressures and a failure to respect ethnic minority languages, religious beliefs, and traditions. In late October 2013, Yu Zhengsheng, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Chinese Communist Party and head of the Central Committee Coordinating Group for Tibet Affairs, urged officials to actively foster ethnic unity and promote the “three inseparables” and “four identifies.”

Grasslands Policy and Protests in Inner Mongolia

IMAR officials continued to detain and beat Mongol herders and nomads who protested authorities’ appropriation of their traditional grazing lands for development projects. National and regional regulations stipulate penalties for unauthorized use of grasslands, but lack protections for the rights of herders. In a number of instances during the 2014 reporting year, Mongol herders protested state and private appropriation of their traditional grazing lands, raising concerns such as inadequate compensation, loss of
livelihood due to environmental destruction, and involuntary resettlement. Representative examples include:

- On May 4, 2014, in Ezenee (Eji’na) Banner, Alshaa (Alashan) League, IMAR, security officials armed with automatic weapons prevented the advance of a demonstration by Mongol herdsmen protesting the use of their grazing lands by Han Chinese migrants.9

- On April 12, 2014, security officials in Horqin (Keerqin) district, Tongliao city, IMAR, detained more than 40 Mongol herdsmen, beating and threatening some, who had protested against a coal transportation company’s use of their grazing lands.10

- In April 2014, authorities in Heshigten (Keshiketeng) Banner, Chifeng municipality, IMAR, detained between seven and eight Mongol herdsmen who had protested a mining company’s dumping of toxic waste on their grazing lands since January 2014, which the herdsmen claimed had caused the death of their livestock.11

- In late March 2014, during and following a visit to the IMAR by Premier Li Keqiang, authorities in Bayannuur (Bayannao’er) municipality and Hohhot city reportedly arrested, detained, and beat a number of Mongol herdsmen protesting against mining companies’ destruction of grasslands and lack of compensation for losses they incurred as a result of official grazing bans and resettlement initiatives.12

In January 2014, authorities in Ongniud (Wengniute) Banner, Chifeng municipality, sentenced six Mongol herdsmen to one- to two-year prison terms for causing damage to the property of a forestry company.13 Local authorities detained the six herdsmen in late May 2013 and formally arrested them on June 24, 2013, following an April 2013 incident in which they clashed with Han Chinese workers from a state-run forestry company they said had “occupied” their traditional grazing lands for decades.14 Twelve herdsmen were reportedly beaten and hospitalized in the April 2013 clash.15 According to the official indictment from the Ongniud Banner People’s Procuratorate, the six men caused damage to the forestry company’s property during the clash totaling nearly 87,000 yuan (US$14,000).16 However, the herdsmen asserted they only caused minimal damage to the company’s property, with an agency hired by the herdsmen reportedly assessing the damage at 2,400 yuan (US$392).17

**Forced Return of Mongol Chinese Citizens**

On May 13, 2014, Mongolian authorities reportedly forcibly returned Mongol rights advocates Dalaibaatar Dovchin and Tulguur Norovrinchen to China, a move an overseas rights advocate suggested may have been carried out under pressure from the Chinese government.18 Mongolian authorities had last forcibly returned a Mongol rights advocate to China in October 2009, when they deported former medical school principal Batzangaa and members of his family.19 Friends of the two rights advocates said Mongolian police detained them while they prepared to attend a press conference regarding another Mongol rights advocate, Alhaa Norovtseren, whom Mongolian authorities had reportedly threat-
ened with deportation. At the time of their deportation, Dovchin reportedly had a valid student visa and Norovrinchen reportedly had a valid Asylum Seeker Certificate issued by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

**Political Prisoners**

Authorities continued to extralegally detain Mongol rights advocate Hada, despite his completion of a 15-year prison sentence on December 10, 2010. According to Hada’s wife Xinna, during the 2014 reporting year, authorities threatened her with detention after she spoke publicly about her husband’s continued extralegal detention and maintained restrictions on the freedom of movement and telephone and Internet access of her and the couple’s son, Uiles. Xinna also stated in March 2014 that authorities had not recently allowed her to visit Hada. As of July 9, 2014, Hada remained in poor health in extralegal detention in Jinye Ecological Park in Hohhot municipality, IMAR. Authorities imprisoned Hada in 1995 after he organized peaceful protests for Mongol rights and for his role in the banned organization he founded, the Southern Mongolian Democratic Alliance.

In late 2013, Bayanhuuara, the wife of rights advocate Batzangaa, reported that he was in poor health, and authorities had denied her request for his release on medical parole. Batzangaa is now serving a three-year prison sentence for economic crimes that authorities originally imposed as a suspended sentence in 2011 after he and his family sought asylum in Mongolia. Bayanhuuara stated that the couple’s daughter was suffering from severe depression as a result of her father’s imprisonment.

In January 2014, herders’ rights advocate Yunshaabiin Seevendoo reportedly stated that due to poor conditions and inadequate medical treatment during his detention, doctors had diagnosed him with kidney failure. Authorities in Uzumchin Right (Xiwuzhumuqin) Banner, Xilingol (Xilinguole) League, IMAR, arrested Seevendoo in July 2013 and released him in December 2013 after sentencing him to three years’ imprisonment suspended for five years. [For information on Uyghur and Tibetan political prisoner cases, see Section IV—Xinjiang and Section V—Tibet.]

**Notes to Section II—Ethnic Minority Rights**

1 “Unified Legal Standards Can Help Battle Terror,” Global Times, 11 March 14; “Xinjiang Officials Flock to Villages for Mass Line Campaign,” Global Times, 20 April 14; Li Yuan and Wen Tao, “Tibet Sends More Than 60,000 Cadres to the Grassroots Over Two Years, the Most Extensive in 60 Years” [Xizang liang nian xuanpai yu 6 wan ganbu xia jiceng wei 60 nian lai zui da guimo], Xinhua, 10 September 13. According to Xinhua, “‘mass line’ refers to a guideline under which CPC officials and members are required to prioritize the interests of the people and persist in representing them and working on their behalf.” Officials Urged To Promote ‘Mass Line’ Campaign,” Xinhua, 16 July 13. For information on the “mass line” and how it applies to religion, see Wang Zuo’an, “Religious Work Is by Nature Mass Work” [Zongjiao gongzuo benzhi shang shi qunzhong gongzuo], People’s Daily, 26 November 13.


8 State Council, Several Opinions on Promoting and Speeding Up Development in Grazing Areas [Guowuyuan guanyu cujin muqu you hao you kuai fazhan de ruogan yijian], PRC Central People’s Government, 9 August 11; UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Monitor the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Mission to the People’s Republic of China from 15 to 23 December 2010, Preliminary Observations and Conclusions, 23 December 10; China’s Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law: Does It Protect Minority Rights? Staff Roundtable submitted by Christopher P. Atwood, Associate Professor, Department of Central Eurasian Studies, Indiana University. For Commission analysis, see “State Council Opinion Bolsters Grazing Ban, Herder Resettlement,” Congressional-Executive Commission on China, 18 October 11.


13 Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center, “Herders Defending Their Grazing Lands Face Long Jail Sentences,” 4 October 13. According to the herders’ lawyer, authorities had charged them with “sabotaging production management.”


16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.


20 Ibid.


22 Ibid.


Ibid.


"Inner Mongolian Dissident’s Family Targeted," Radio Free Asia, 5 December 10; Hada, Xinna, and Uiles, Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center, “Open Letter From Hada and His Family Members,” 2 July 14; Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center, “SMHRIC Statement to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association,” 19 February 14. For Commission analysis on Hada, Xinna, and Uiles, see “Authorities Heighten Persecution of Detained Mongol Rights Advocate’s Wife and Son,” CRCC China Human Rights and Rule of Law Update, No. 1, 3 January 13. For more information on these cases, see the following records in the Commission’s Political Prisoner Database: 2004-02045 on Hada; 2010-00704 on Xinna; and 2010-00705 on Uiles.


Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center, “Two Other Herders Sentenced to 3 Years in Jail, One Suffers From Kidney Failure,” 19 January 14; Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center, “Mongolian Herder’s Rights Defender in Poor Health at Chinese Detention Center,” 2 September 13.

Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center, “Two Other Herders Sentenced to Three Years in Jail, One Suffers From Kidney Failure,” 19 January 14.