

Congressional-Executive Commission on China

Hearing

on

Preserving Tibet: Combating Cultural Erasure, Forced Assimilation and Transnational Repression

Tuesday, March 28, 2023 – 10:00 a.m.

2200 Rayburn House Office Building & Virtual via Cisco Webex

Statement of Senator Jeff Merkley

Cochair

Congressional-Executive Commission on China

- Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I really appreciate that you have convened this hearing and I look forward to continuing to work with you on our shared agenda for this Congress.
- This hearing will touch on several aspects of that agenda. We'll hear about the unrelenting efforts by the Chinese government to erase the cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity in China. We'll hear about the long arm of transnational repression and how authorities reach beyond China's borders to harass and intimidate, including here in the United States. We'll hear about how companies headquartered here can be complicit in the use of their technologies to abet the machinery of the surveillance state. And we'll hear about the indomitable human spirit of those yearning to live their lives in dignity despite these assaults on their families and their way of life.
- This hearing explores these issues through the lens of how they affect Tibetans. It builds on several hearings we held last Congress to give voice to the aspirations of the Tibetan people, in which we examined Tibet's environment, political prisoners, language rights, and obstacles to resolving conflict through dialogue.
- The chair and I have been joined in shining a spotlight on these issues by one of Tibetans' great champions, this Commission's former chair Jim McGovern. Due to another hearing, Congressman McGovern cannot be here today but will be submitting a statement for the record. I hope that the bipartisan legislation he has led in the House with Congressman McCaul and I lead in the Senate with Senator Young, the Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Conflict Act, will advance this Congress. And thank you so much, Chairman, for drawing attention to it and I really hope we can see it expedited. Dialogue to resolve this conflict remains frozen, as it has been for 13 years, due to Chinese authorities' refusal to meet with the Dalai Lama or his representatives. Our legislation aims to bolster existing U.S. policy seeking meaningful and direct dialogue without preconditions to lead to a negotiated agreement on Tibet.
- The Tibetan people, like people everywhere, deserve a say in how they are governed. The right to self-determination is foundational to the concept of universal human rights,

enshrined in the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Yet the Chinese government's policies preclude Tibetans from exercising that most basic right. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on what those fighting for the rights of Tibetans can do about this.

- And I invite our witnesses to share their perspectives on how we can better protect Tibet's linguistic, religious, and cultural heritage. Much has been done in this area over the decades through the works of the Dalai Lama and the Central Tibetan Administration. Yet as today's testimony will reinforce, Chinese authorities' frontal assault on Tibetan language and culture now brings elevated challenges, such as the Chinese attempt to erase Tibetans' Tibetan-ness. The vast majority of Tibetan children are now placed in colonial boarding schools, as the chairman has referred to. Some 80 percent of the children six to eighteen being placed in these schools. Children now even in preschool being put into these schools. This story gets worse with each passing month.
- The people of Tibet face urgent challenges and I hope today's hearing will help us understand better how we can support them.