

Statement to the US Congressional Executive Commission on China (CECC) Hearing: “The PRC’s Universal Periodic Review and the Real State of Human Rights in China”

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My name is Enghebatu Togochoog. I am the Director of the Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center (SMHRIC), a New York based human rights organization dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights of the Mongolian people in Southern Mongolia, widely known as “Inner Mongolia” of the People’s Republic of China. As the United Nations Human Rights Council has recently conducted the Universal Period Review on China, I would like to bring to the attention of the Congressional Executive Commission on China the PRC’s systematic repression of the rights of the Southern Mongolians, ongoing cultural genocide as well as escalating transnational repression of Southern Mongolian exiles and the citizens of the independent country of Mongolia.

SYSTEMATIC REPRESSION

Officially incorporated into the People’s Republic of China in 1949, Southern Mongolia, this vast Mongolian historical territory that includes the so-called “Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region” and other Mongolian-inhabited areas in the neighboring Chinese provinces, is currently home to a population of six million Mongolians that is twice as large as that of the independent country of Mongolia in the north. Publicly advertised as the “model autonomy” by the Chinese government, Southern Mongolia has always been the de facto testing ground of China’s all forms of ethnic policies including genocide, ethnic cleansing, political purge, economic exploitation, cultural eradication, linguistic assimilation, social marginalization, resource extraction and environmental destruction.

As early as the late 1940s, the Chinese Communist Party had experimented it’s “Land Reform Movement” in Southern Mongolia even before the establishment of the People’s Republic of China. Mongolian land was effectively confiscated and distributed to the Chinese settlers, and tens of thousands of Southern Mongolians were executed as “herd-lords”; Soon after the founding of the PRC, at least 20,000 Southern Mongolians elite intellectuals were persecuted as “national rightists” for demanding the materialization of “nationality autonomy” that the Chinese Communist government promised to Southern Mongolia; From the late 1960s through the early 1970s, Southern Mongolia had experienced a text-book example of genocide campaign carefully designed by the Chinese Central Government and carried out by the People’s Liberation Army and Chinese settlers. Estimated 100,000 Southern Mongolians were tortured to death, and a half million persecuted. One third of the Southern Mongolian population was effected by this unprecedented scale of genocide;

In the early 1980s, the Chinese Central Government accelerated the process of Chinese migration to Southern Mongolia. As a result, in 1981, a large-scale student movement broke out across Southern Mongolia. After a three-month long region-wide student protest, the Chinese Government cracked down on the students and arrested, detained and imprisoned the student leaders and supporters; In the early 1990s, Southern Mongolian intellectuals established a number of underground organizations protesting Chinese occupation and demanding national freedom. All of them were harshly crushed by the Chinese authorities. In 1995, one such organization Southern Mongolian Democratic Alliance (SMDA) whose goal was to achieve the total independence of Southern Mongolia and ultimately to merge with the independent country of Mongolia was declared as a “national separatist organization”. The President and the Vice President of the organization, Mr. Hada and Mr. Tegexi, were arrested and sentenced to 15 years and 10 years in jail respectively on charges of “separatism and espionage”. Nearly 70 other members were arrested, detained and sent to jail ranging from 3 months to a year. Since 2020, Mr. Hada, his family members and other former political prisoners have gone missing.

Starting 2001, the PRC government has launched a renewed attack on the Mongolian traditional nomadic way of life. Two sets of policies, namely the “Ecological Migration” and “Livestock Grazing Ban” were introduced to forcibly displace the entire Mongolian herders population from their ancestral lands to overwhelmingly Chinese-populated urban and agricultural areas. These displaced herders became homeless, jobless and landless. Mongolian pastoralist way of life and nomadic civilization were effectively wiped out. Southern Mongolians consider this as a critical step of China’s overall cultural genocide in Southern Mongolia. According to the Chinese Central Government State Council announcement published on its website in May 2012, by the end of 2015, China would resettle the remaining nomad population of 246,000 households or 1.157 million nomads within the borders of China. This means by end of 2015, the millennial-old nomadic civilization was officially put to an end in China.

In 2009, the Chinese Central Government announced that Southern Mongolia became “China’s largest energy base”. Chinese extractive industries including major state-run mining corporations and thousands of ninja miners rushed into Southern Mongolia. In May 2011, a region-wide protest broke out in Southern Mongolia, sparked by the brutal killing of a Mongolian herder who defended his land from coal miners. Tens of thousands of students took to the street supporting the wide-spread herders protest across the region. The Chinese authorities responded with riot police and paramilitary forces to put down the uprising. Hundreds were arrested, detained and jailed. Resource extraction and environmental destruction have not been put to a halt, only to be exacerbated.

ONGOING CULTURAL GENOCIDE

As the final step of the cultural genocide campaign, in June 2020, the Chinese Central Government announced to implement the “Second Generation Bilingual Education”, a new policy for the fresh attack on Mongolian culture. The goal of the new policy is clear: wipe out Mongolian language, culture and identity and turn Southern Mongolia into a homogenous, worry-free Chinese society.

In response to this, starting late August 2020, the Southern Mongolians carried out a region-wide nonviolent resistance movement. The entire Southern Mongolian populace stood up to the Chinese regime. From kindergarteners to college professors, from ordinary herders to prominent scholars, from party members to government employees, from artists to athletes, from lawyers to police officers, from taxi drivers to delivery men, all walks of life of Southern Mongolian society took part in the protest in one way or another. At least 300,000 Mongolian students went on a total school strike. The Chinese authorities harshly cracked down on the movement. Estimated 8,000-10,000 Southern Mongolians have been arrested, detained, jailed and placed under house arrest. 11 Southern Mongolians lost their lives in defense of rights to mother tongue. What followed this heavy-handed crackdown was a full-scale and full-speed cultural genocide campaign whose scope has extended far beyond the simple switch of medium of instruction from Mongolian to Chinese in schools.

Starting January 1, 2021, all government mouthpieces including the Inner Mongolia Radio and Television Mongolian language services have been ordered to start replacing Mongolian cultural programs with Chinese ones in order to promote “the strong sense of Chinese (zhong hua) nationality common identity”. “Learn Chinese and become a civilized person” has been an official slogan publicly promoting the Chinese supremacy over Mongolian language, culture and identity. Slogans of “mutual interaction, mutual exchange and mutual assimilation of all ethnic groups to firmly establish the Chinese nationality common identity” have been aired repeatedly from TV and Radio Stations across the region. In schools, Mongolian students are subjected to military style training and propaganda activities. Mongolian college students are forced to wear Mao suits and sing communist “red” songs to extol the greatness of China. Mongolian teachers and professors are brought to the Chinese Communist red-base Yan’an to receive patriotic education.

In a move to justify the total elimination of Mongolian languages from the entire educational system in Southern Mongolia, the Chinese National Congress announced recently that “education in minority languages as local legislations stipulated is unconstitutional”, according to the Chinese official press People’s. This overwrites the Article 4 of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China that states “All ethnicities have the freedoms and rights to use and develop their own spoken and written languages and to preserve or reform their own folkways and customs.” Local authorities in the Autonomous Region reacted promptly to implement this directive. Subjects on Mongolian culture and history taught in Mongolian in local schools are considered “underemphasizing the Chinese nationality common identity and deliberately overemphasizing individual ethnic group’s ‘ethnic identity’ and ‘ethnic sentiment’, and removed from curriculum across the region.

In an effort to completely block all avenues of learning Mongolian, on January 9, 2021, the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region Department of Education issued a document to “ban any school from gathering students to offer extracurricular learning courses or teaching new courses. It strictly prohibited middle and elementary school teachers from organizing or participating in any training organizations outside the campus or any paid make-up courses organized by teachers, parents and parents’ committees, or inducing students to participate in any paid make-up courses organized by themselves or others; Introducing student sources and providing relevant information to any training organization outside the school campus is strictly prohibited,”

according to one of Chinese official presses Xin Lang Wang. Flagrant cultural annihilation is most visible in the series of arts and cultural performances put together by the Chinese authorities for the Mongolian Tsagaan Sar, traditional Mongolian new year.

Peking operas have replaced the Mongolian traditional art performance in TV programs across the region. In some programs, Mongolian traditional dances are converted to hybrid ones that exhibit full features of Chinese operas. Horse-head fiddle, a traditional Mongolian musical instrument, is played in concert with suona, a distinctively high-pitched instrument often played in Chinese traditional music ensembles. Mongolian most sacred sites like Oboo, a stone altar devoted to the worship of Eternal Sky and local gods, are also targeted by this campaign. Chinese traditional performers like Yangge dancers frequently showed up on Oboo sites to mock the Mongolian Oboo ritual ceremony. Sculptures of Mongolian historical figures have been taken down and smashed; signs in Mongolian are removed from schools, buildings, streets and parks. The latest footage we received shows that a group of construction workers are removing the Mongolian letters from the official sign of the Hohhot City People's Procuratorates in the regional capital. In another photo, a group of Mongolian students stood next their school entrance Mongolian sign that is scheduled to be removed on the next day. Mongolian publications are banned altogether, and Mongolian books are taken down from bookstore shelves; printing and copy services on the street are ordered not to provide services of printing and copying any materials in Mongolian; postal and courier services are instructed not to deliver any Mongolian books and publications.

On the official front, a region-wide intensive training program was launched. According to the Inner Mongolia News official website, the first session of the Region-wide Educational System Special Training for the Firm Inculcation of the Chinese Nationality Common Identity started on December 8, 2020. Although the exact details of the training and the total number of trainees remains unknown, the report confirmed a three-phase training program will complete by the end of March, 2021. Other regional and local news revealed that the synchronized training sessions were held in all schools, colleges and universities throughout the Autonomous Region.

A 47-page internal document entitled "Propaganda Pamphlet for Inculcating the Chinese Nationality Common Identity to Push for the Usage of Nationally Compiled Textbook and National Common Language Education" was issued by the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region Department of Education in January 2021. According to a trainee who asked not to be identified, all the lectures, discussions, reflections and quizzes are centered at this document. Quoting Xi Jinping's remarks, the document "urges the masses to communicate and train together to take up the work of interfusing the feelings, to strive hard to create a social condition of living together, learning together, working together and enjoying together, and urges all ethnic groups to accept the great mother country, Chinese nationality, Chinese culture, Chinese Communist Party and the socialism with Chinese characteristics." The document also warns the Southern Mongolians that "the wrong path of narrow nationalism can easily lead to the return of separatist tendency."

A trainee who managed to leave China and arrived in the United States recently told us that he and all of his Mongolian coworkers were put to this training for 2 months. During the training, they must denounce their "narrow nationalism" and "nationalistic feeling", and embrace the "Chinese Nationality Common Identity". They must provide all of their social contacts and the

details of social media activities to the authorities. Toward to the end of the training, they were forced to confess their supposed “mistakes” including their past gatherings where they wore Mongolian traditional clothes and sung Mongolian songs. They were warned that these are the mistakes that are against with the spirit of “Chinese nationality common identity”. They had to answer multiple questionnaires designed to assess their “ideological improvement”. One of the questions, the trainee said, was “How many Chinese friends do you have?” Those who answered “none” or few were put to extended trainings before they were qualified to “graduate”. Before the release, all trainees must sign a paper to promise that they do not engage in any activities of highlighting “Mongolian characteristics” and expressing “nationalistic feeling”.

In the last ditch of effort to erase the Mongolian language from Southern Mongolia, in September 2023, the government of China officially ordered ALL Mongolian schools, from kindergartens to colleges, to teach ALL subjects in Chinese exclusively. This concludes China’s three-year long language erasure campaign to remove Mongolian language completely from the entire educational system in Southern Mongolia.

TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION IN MONGOLIA

China’s transnational repression of Southern Mongolians started from the day one of the annexation in 1949. As soon as establishing its regime in Southern Mongolia, the Chinese government pressured the government of Mongolia to deport back those Southern Mongolian freedom fighters and independent movements leaders including the Prince Demchegdonv, the iconic figure of Southern Mongolian independence movement and the General Li Shou Xin, the commander of the Southern Mongolian army. Both of them were deported back to China and died in house arrest. Hundreds of other Southern Mongolian freedom fighters were also deported back from the independent country of Mongolia, and many of them including the legendary Southern Mongolian guerilla leader Han Sanjee were executed in 1950s.

These transnational repressions failed to stop Southern Mongolians’ aspiration for national freedom and independence. Tens of thousands of Southern Mongolians continued to leave China for Mongolia. China continued to pressure the government of Mongolia to deport them back. For example, in 1987, two Southern Mongolian students leaders Mr. Baatar and Mr. Ulaangerel crossed the border and entered the independent country of Mongolia. China demanded the immediate extradition, and both were extradited back to China. Mr. Baater had his arm broken by rifle butts when refused to kneel in a gesture of submission before the Chinese. Both of them were sentenced to 8 years in prison.

The PRC’s transnational repression of Southern Mongolians continued even after Mongolia became a democracy in 1992. Recent cases of deportation of Southern Mongolian exiles and activists include the cases of Mr. Batzangaa, Mr. Dalaibaatar, Mr. Tulguur, Mr. Unenbaatar Loojab, and Mr. Lhamjab Borjigin. Dissident and activist Mr. Batzangaa was the head of a Mongol-Tibetan Medical School in Southern Mongolia prior to his exile. In 2009, he escaped China and arrived in Mongolia. Chinese authorities sent their own police and worked with Mongolian authorities and arrested him in front of the UNHCR building in Ulaanbaatar, and deported back to China along with wife and 9 years old daughter. Later on, after his attempt to apply political asylum with the US Consulate in Guang Zhou, he was imprisoned for 3 years.

The latest case of arrest and extradition of Southern Mongolian dissident in the independent country of Mongolia is the case of Mr. Lhamjab Borjigin. He is a Southern Mongolian dissident writer and historian. In 2019, Mr. Lhamjab Borjigin was sentenced to 2 years in prison for writing a book entitled the “China’s Cultural Revolution”. In March 2023, he managed to escape from house arrest and arrived in Ulaanbaatar, capital of Mongolia. In May 2023, the Chinese authorities sent their own police and arrested and deported him back to China. While he was in Ulaanbaatar, he contacted the UNHCR in Thailand and applied refugee status. Currently his whereabouts and health conditions are unknown.

The PRC’s transnational repression to silence any criticism in Mongolia reached a new height. In February 2022, Mr. Munkhbayar Chuluundorj, a long term human rights activist, writer and journalist, **citizen of the independent country of Mongolia**, was arrested by the Mongolian General Intelligence Agency and later on sentenced to 10 years in prison on a charge of “Working with a foreign intelligence agency to spy against the People’s Republic of China”. The so-called “foreign intelligence agency” is the Indian Embassy to Mongolia. As a human rights activist, Munkhbayar met with Indian Embassy personnel and criticized China’s human rights violation in Southern Mongolia, and China’s malign influence in the independent country of Mongolia. We consider this as China’s new level of transnational repression in Mongolia as, until 2022, China’s transnational repression was always limited to arresting and deporting Southern Mongolian exiles in Mongolia. Pressuring the government of Mongolia to punish Mongolian citizen for criticizing China is unrepresented.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the PRC’s systematic repression of all kind of rights of the Mongolian people in Southern Mongolia, ongoing cultural genocide campaign that goes far beyond the simple removal of language, and the Chinese authorities’ unrepresented level of aggressiveness in transnational repression of Southern Mongolian exiles and Mongolian citizen in the independent country of Mongolia, I would like to make the following recommendations to the United States Congress:

1. Carry out a thorough investigation on the serious gross human rights violation in Southern Mongolia, particularly the ongoing cultural genocide;
2. In accordance with the recommendations the US Congress made officially in the appropriation bills, establish a Mongolian language broadcast in Voice of America to help Southern Mongolians to keep their language alive and establish a channel to the free and democratic world;
3. Introduce and pass a legislation similar to Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act and Tibet Policy and Support Act to support the six million Southern Mongolians in their efforts to defend their basic human rights and fundamental freedoms;
4. Urge the PRC government to stop its transnational repression of Southern Mongolian exiles and citizens of the independent country of Mongolia.

Thank you,