

Congressional-Executive Commission on China

Hearing

on

Tibet: Barriers to Settling an Unresolved Conflict

Thursday, June 23, 2022 – 9:00am

H-313 of the U.S. Capitol & Virtual via Cisco Webex

Statement of Senator Jeff Merkley

Chair

Congressional-Executive Commission on China

- Good morning. Today’s hearing of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China on “Tibet: Barriers to Settling an Unresolved Conflict” will come to order.
- More than 70 years after the invasion that led to Chinese rule in Tibet, Tibetans continue to struggle in the face of unrelenting oppression. Chinese authorities routinely violate Tibetans’ freedoms of religion, expression, and assembly, as well as denying Tibetans’ self-determination.
- The Chinese Communist Party has waged a years-long campaign of “sinicization” requiring conformity with officially sanctioned interpretations of religion and culture, not the authentic practice and teaching of Tibetan Buddhism. Contrary to that practice and teaching, the Chinese government even insists on its own authority to select the next reincarnation of the Dalai Lama, who authorities label a security threat. Those who express reverence for the Dalai Lama are punished.
- Also punished are those who express dissatisfaction with Chinese rule in Tibet. These punishments range from warnings to surveillance to interrogation and detention. The Commission’s Political Prisoner Database currently includes records of 715 Tibetans detained or imprisoned for political or religious reasons. We note that there are considerably more cases of detention in China than we can capture in the database.
- Increasingly, this oppression threatens the religious, cultural, linguistic, and historical identity of the Tibetan people. Earlier this year, we heard testimony about insidious efforts to separate Tibetan children from their parents, with nearly 80 percent of all Tibetan children now placed in boarding schools to disrupt the intergenerational transfer of language and culture. We are observing an expansion of that practice to children going to kindergarten.
- This Commission has documented these kinds of human rights violations in Tibet for 20 years and we will continue to do so. In today’s hearing, our focus turns to the dialogue needed to address the aspirations of the Tibetan people for their basic rights and self-

determination to be respected. Sadly, that dialogue has been frozen for 12 years as Chinese authorities refuse to meet with the Dalai Lama or his representatives.

- The longstanding policy of the United States is to promote dialogue without preconditions to lead to a negotiated agreement on Tibet. In other words, we recognize that this remains an unsettled conflict that must be addressed.
- Yet the Chinese government would have the world believe that Tibet is an internal affair, and that issues of its status are resolved. This narrative ignores Tibet's history, and today's hearing aims to set the historical record straight. Our witnesses will share with us their considerable experience analyzing the history of Tibet, the international law dimensions of the conflict, the barriers to resuming dialogue, and U.S. policy on Tibet. I hope this hearing helps cut through Chinese propaganda and bring attention to the true historical underpinnings of the Tibetan quest for autonomy.
- I'd also like to welcome the members of the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile – it's good to have you here – the International Campaign for Tibet, dignitaries, and other friends of Tibet who are with us this morning while they are in town for the 8th World Parliamentarians' Convention on Tibet. Thank you for joining us.
- The causes of Tibetan human rights and self-determination need champions all over the globe and I look forward to continuing to work with my fellow parliamentarians to advance the causes of human dignity and freedom wherever we can.
- Among global elected officials, few have been as great friends of Tibet as my Cochair, Congressman McGovern, who for many years has led the charge in the U.S. Congress to pass legislation and advocate for the Tibetan people. I'd now like to recognize him for his opening remarks.