

**PRESERVING TIBET: COMBATING CULTURAL  
ERASURE, FORCED ASSIMILATION,  
AND TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION**

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**HEARING**  
BEFORE THE  
**CONGRESSIONAL-EXECUTIVE  
COMMISSION ON CHINA**  
ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS  
FIRST SESSION

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MARCH 28, 2023  
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# **PRESERVING TIBET: COMBATING CULTURAL ERASURE, FORCED ASSIMILATION, AND TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION**

**TUESDAY, MARCH 28, 2023**

CONGRESSIONAL-EXECUTIVE  
COMMISSION ON CHINA,  
*Washington, DC.*

The hearing was held from 10:00 a.m. to 11:50 a.m., in Room 106, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, DC, Representative Chris Smith, Chair, Congressional-Executive Commission on China, presiding.

## **OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. CHRISTOPHER SMITH, A U.S. REPRESENTATIVE FROM NEW JERSEY; CHAIR, CONGRESSIONAL-EXECUTIVE COMMISSION ON CHINA**

Chair SMITH. This hearing, “Preserving Tibet: Combating Cultural Erasure, Forced Assimilation, and Transnational Repression,” will come to order.

Today’s hearing is an extremely important one. We are greatly honored and privileged to hear testimony from a distinguished panel of experts who will not only further document massive human rights abuses committed by the Chinese Communist Party against the people of Tibet, but will also point us toward a way forward to the preservation of Tibet, its language, its culture, its religion, and its people. All of us need to do a better job exposing and reversing, or at least mitigating, the ugly, hate-filled campaign by the Chinese Communist Party to erase an entire people, the people of Tibet.

Cultural erasure happens when a people’s language, and religious and cultural heritage are stripped from them, when children are taken from their parents and placed in institutions, colonial boarding schools, where they cannot speak their language or practice their religion but instead are taught in an alien tongue and aggressively indoctrinated, while the ties that bind them to their families and culture are eviscerated. Roughly 80 percent of all Tibetan children within the Tibet Autonomous Region of the People’s Republic of China are housed in such institutions. This is child abuse of the cruelest kind.

According to the 2022 State Department Human Rights Report, the Chinese Communist Party’s human rights abuses in Tibet include effectively placing Tibetan Buddhism under central government control and subjecting Tibetan women to coerced abortion or forced sterilization. What is also shocking is how intrusive the

CCP's totalitarian reach really is. Biometric data—DNA and its scans—of over a million Tibetans, and others, have been harvested and stored by the CCP. Blood samples were drawn even from children in kindergarten.

And what is even more shocking is the role of an American company, Thermo Fisher Scientific, in this genetic data collection and genetic surveillance program. In December of last year, Senator Merkley and I, along with Ranking Members Rubio and McGovern, wrote a letter to Mark Casper, President and CEO of Thermo Fisher asking him why DNA kits and DNA sequencer replacement parts were still being sold directly by his company to police in the Tibet Autonomous Region for use and abuse in collecting biometric data.

We know this—and more importantly, he knows this—because there have been multiple reports by Toronto-based Citizen Lab, and our Commission itself, of Thermo Fisher products being implicated in ongoing human rights abuse throughout the People's Republic of China, through the use of DNA obtained from Tibetans, Uyghurs, and other ethnic and religious minorities. Indeed, the most nefarious misuses of DNA collected have been to find matches for organ recipients from unwilling, healthy innocent people. There is a mountain of evidence that this is what is being done in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region against the Uyghurs and other Central Asians such as the Kazakhs and Falun Gong practitioners.

And I would note, parenthetically, that last night the House passed with just two votes in opposition a bill that throws the book at this horrific forced organ harvest transplantation effort, where tens of thousands of people are murdered by Xi Jinping and the CCP to obtain their organs. The average is two to three organs per person. And I chaired a hearing last year with the Lantos Commission on this very issue and heard from experts. And I was shocked. I've been working on this for years. I was shocked by just how pervasive it is and how lucrative it is for the Chinese Communist Party. And one other footnote to that: When any Chinese Communist Party official gets sick and has needed a new liver, or a new lung, or heart, who do they turn to? Those people that they despise the most. And the average age of those who are murdered for their organs is 28 years old.

Finally, I want to note that Tibet is important because of what has happened in Tibet. The early 50s is the template for so many of the crimes against humanity which we see play out within the recognized borders of the People's Republic of China today. Indeed, both Tibet and Xinjiang are autonomous only in name. Both suffer from Xi Jinping's genocide. For genocide is not only what we associate with the Holocaust, and surely that was one of the most egregious genocides ever to occur—but it's also happening today throughout China against the Tibetans, but slowly, beyond the visibility of the press, Congress, and parliaments around the world. It's also happening in Xinjiang, as we know as well.

According to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, acts of genocide include intending to destroy "in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group." It also includes causing serious bodily or mental harm to

members of the group, imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group, and forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. That is what is happening in Tibet. And it is, as I said, genocide.

Before I yield to my good friend and colleague, co-chair of the Commission, Senator Merkley, who, along with Ranking Member McGovern in the House, is the coauthor of the Resolve Tibet Act, which underscores as a matter of policy that the Tibet-PRC conflict remains unresolved and makes clear that our country's support for Tibet will never waver. Some of the policy—this is right from the text of the bill—it claims, and it's true, of course, that claims made by the officials of the People's Republic of China and the Chinese Communist Party that Tibet has been part of China since ancient times are historically false.

The policy directed in this legislation also says the government of the PRC has failed to meet the expectations of the United States to engage in meaningful dialogue with the Dalai Lama or his representatives toward a peaceful settlement of the unresolved conflict between Tibet and the PRC, and that the United States public diplomacy efforts should counter disinformation about Tibet from the government of the PRC and the Chinese Communist Party, including disinformation about the history of Tibet, the Tibetan people, and Tibetan institutions, including the Dalai Lama.

It's an excellent bill, and the sooner it's on the floor for passage, the better. And I want to yield to the author of it over on the Senate side, my good friend Chairman Merkley.

Co-chair MERKLEY. 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.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JEFF MERKLEY, A U.S. SENATOR FROM OREGON; CO-CHAIR, CONGRESSIONAL-EXECUTIVE COMMISSION ON CHINA**

This hearing will touch on several aspects of that agenda. We'll hear about the unrelenting efforts by the Chinese government to erase 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 joined in shining a spotlight on these issues with one of Tibet's 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.

And I hope that the bipartisan legislation he has led in the House with Congressman McCaul, and which I lead in the Senate with Senator Young, the Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Conflict Act, will advance during 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 U.N. 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 all of us can do better to protect and support Tibet's linguistic, religious, and cultural heritage.

Much has been done in this area over the decades through the work 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—80 percent of the children six to eighteen are being placed in these schools, children now even in preschool are 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.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chair SMITH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We have a member on remotely.

Congresswoman Steel.

**STATEMENT OF HON. MICHELLE STEEL,  
A U.S. REPRESENTATIVE FROM CALIFORNIA**

Representative STEEL. Thank you, Chairman, for hosting this important hearing. Every person has the right to religious and cultural beliefs. Governments, including the CCP, have no right to restrict these fundamental beliefs. It was an honor to meet the 14th Dalai Lama in 2016. It is inexcusable that the people of Tibet are not free and are currently met with punishment ranging from warnings and surveillance to interrogation and detention. We cannot sit by while the Tibetans are being detained and imprisoned for political or religious reasons. So, to all the witnesses, the CCP continues to have oversight on Tibetan religious life by mandating political education for monks and nuns, can you believe, creating an apparatus to surveil and manage monastic institutions. Can you

expand more on how CCP authorities continue to reorient Tibetan society?

Chair SMITH. Okay, thank you, Congresswoman Steel. We will ask that the panel respond to that after we get through all of their opening statements. I would like to now yield to Congressman Nunn.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ZACHARY NUNN,  
A REPRESENTATIVE FROM IOWA**

Representative NUNN. First of all, thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for scheduling this important hearing to examine the impact of the Chinese Communist Party's repressive rule of Tibetans. And I look forward to the testimony today from this august panel who've taken time to be with us. I also want to express my gratitude for being able to serve on this bipartisan, bicameral commission with my colleagues in the House as well as in the Senate and the executive branch who are with us. It's a privilege to participate because I believe very strongly that this is a critical examination of what needs to be done to ensure that China's compliance with international human rights standards is held firm.

Look, as a former intelligence officer myself, with nearly two decades of experience both in the military and working in counterintelligence operations inside of China, I've seen firsthand the national and the economic threat posed by China's global interests. And we've seen throughout the course of recent events, China will do whatever it takes for that level of global domination. In Wang Jingze's book *Thirty-Six Stratagems*, he highlights a theory that is steeped in Chinese cultural history, this idea of sacrificing the plum tree to preserve the peach tree. Now, what they mean by this is that you can sacrifice in the short term those who are most vulnerable for the strength of those who are in power.

We are seeing this play out constantly in the autonomous state of Tibet today by the Chinese government. Even individuals who are here in this room today know that the Chinese government is relentless in its approach to applying advanced technology to repress and track its very own people. Intrusive electronic surveillance is prevalent at every level. With this fact alone, it is cause for concern. The forced and often arbitrary collection of sensitive biometric information on millions of Tibetans and other local residents by their government officials is dangerous, it is repressive, and it is a clear violation of basic human rights.

By leveraging this technology, the Chinese government can identify people not only by their face but also by their cellular data, the very essence of who they are. The Tibetan population is put at serious risk of genealogical repression for future generations, who will be targeted on the basis of their DNA. In fact, between 2016 and 2022, the DNA collection program in the Tibet Autonomous Region is believed to have catalogued as many as 1.2 million, approximately a third of the entire population of this region. And worse yet, Chinese authorities are targeting this data collection, as the chairman highlighted, at primary schools where they're taking blood from children as young as five years old—all of this done without any parental notification or consent.

China's pervasive surveillance technology does not stop at the Tibetan border. The CCP's repression efforts extend to Tibetan communities abroad and are further evidence of the extreme lengths to which the Communist Party will go to undertake the dismantlement of the entire Tibetan civilization. This biometric data is a legitimate threat that will only deepen the CCP's control over indigenous populations around the globe, and its use violates international norms and concerns with privacy. Ownership of this biometric data is a basic human right and deserves protection everywhere in the world.

And so, Mr. Chair, before I conclude my opening statement, I want to make my position on the United States companies selling technology to China today very clear. Any U.S. company transacting with the Chinese government to sell technology that can be used to further the Chinese government's repression is equally complicit. China's blatant human rights violations should immediately be clear, and those companies need to sever their ties with these violators.

So, again, to both the chairman in the House and the Senate, I look forward to our witnesses' statements today, the recommendations that you're providing to us, so that we can take constructive action on this and make sure that China does not use their authoritarian surveillance or put others in a place where they also become subject to this type of totalitarian state.

With that, I yield back the remainder of my time and thank the panel for being here today.

Chair SMITH. Thank you so very much for your very strong statement. We welcome you to the Commission and look forward to your leadership, which will be greatly appreciated. [Applause.]

Under Secretary of State Uzra Zeya is here remotely. She's going to now provide her opening comments as well.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. UZRA ZEYA, UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE FOR CIVILIAN SECURITY, DEMOCRACY, AND HUMAN RIGHTS, AND U.S. SPECIAL COORDINATOR FOR TIBETAN ISSUES**

Secretary ZEYA. Thank you, Representative Smith, Senator Merkley, and my fellow distinguished commissioners for the opportunity to speak today on this timely and important topic. I'd like to welcome our distinguished guests, Sikyong Tsering, Mr. Gere, Ms. Tethong, and Mr. Dorjee, whose valuable insights I look forward to hearing.

We're gathered here today at a critical moment for Tibet. PRC authorities continue to wage a campaign of repression that seeks to forcibly sinicize the 6 million Tibetans in the PRC and eliminate Tibet's distinct religious, cultural, and linguistic heritage. Recent reports on government-run boarding schools and involuntary mass DNA collection in Tibetan areas shock the conscience. These policies, targeting ethnic minorities and religious practitioners, are part of broader PRC efforts to reshape and undermine human rights globally, including through various acts of transnational repression.

This administration will continue to shine a light on Tibet-related issues within our broader human rights concerns with the

PRC, bilaterally and jointly with multilateral partners, and promote accountability for the PRC's human rights abuses in Tibet and elsewhere. As U.S. Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues, I am committed to continuing this administration's close and sustained cooperation with Congress to deepen our strong track record of support for the Tibetan community and uphold an affirmative vision for human rights.

I'd also like to put forward two questions to our distinguished panelists. First, as we know, the PRC subjects Tibetans to intense surveillance and draconian controls over the flow of information, including the simple act of talking to those outside the PRC. These threats extend outside the PRC, as authorities target Tibetans through in-person and virtual harassment, as well as threats to family and friends still living inside the PRC. Understanding the impenetrability of the Great Firewall, how can we improve information flow into and out of the Tibet Autonomous Region?

As U.S. Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues, I've prioritized engagement with our partners and allies to enlist multilateral support for the global Tibetan community, especially on the issue of the Dalai Lama's succession. My second question is, how can the international community continue to elevate this issue multilaterally and what actions have you seen as being most effective to challenging PRC narratives? Thank you.

Chair SMITH. Thank you very much, Madam Secretary. And thank you for those excellent questions, which I know the panel looks forward to answering.

I would like to welcome, again, an incredibly distinguished panel, beginning with the Sikyong of the Central Tibetan Administration, Penpa Tsering. He's the leader of Tibet's government-in-exile, known as the Central Tibetan Administration. He was sworn in as the Sikyong at an official ceremony graced by His Holiness the Dalai Lama himself, on May 27th, 2021.

Mr. Tsering's service to the Tibetan cause and people includes his election in 1996 to the Tibetan parliament-in-exile, employing his knowledge of economics, and he also served in the parliament's budget estimate committee multiple times. In 2001, he was re-elected as a member of the Tibetan Parliament, during which time he took the role of executive director of the Tibetan Parliamentary and Policy Research Center, a research agency based in New Delhi. As executive director, his outreach efforts directed toward Indian political leaders led to the successful revival of the All-Party Indian Parliamentary Forum for Tibet.

In 2008, after his reelection to a third term as a member of the Tibetan parliament, he was elected as a speaker of the 14th Tibetan parliament-in-exile, and in 2011 he was again elected as speaker. He is a tremendous diplomat. Many of us who have met him are very much impressed with his skills, his diplomacy, and his compassion. And he will be coming to us remotely from India and will be our first witness.

Our next witness, no stranger to the Congress—House and Senate—and to this Commission, a true champion of human rights and democracy, and for the people of Tibet, is Richard Gere. He is chairman of the board of directors for the International Campaign for Tibet. He's a very successful actor. And I've seen, and my wife,

most of his movies. We love them. “First Knight” was my favorite, but there are many other good ones in there. [Laughter.] He’s an amazing humanitarian, as I said, and a man of tremendous compassion.

For more than 30 years, he has worked not only to draw attention to the situation in Tibet and His Holiness the Dalai Lama, but also to provide practical resolutions and solutions to the humanitarian crisis that is rooted in injustice, inequality, and intolerance. He also campaigned for awareness and education in HIV/AIDS-affected communities. He has helped to build the first female dormitory in India for HIV-positive women, their children, and HIV-positive orphans. In 1991, he founded the Gere Foundation, a private foundation focused on advocacy, education, human rights, and cultural preservation.

Richard has also used his popularity and his very articulate voice to amplify the nonviolent struggle for Tibet, which he brings to us again today. He’s co-founder and chairman of Tibet House in the U.S. since 1987. He joined the International Campaign for Tibet’s board of directors, where he has served as chairman since 1995. So I just want to thank him for that tenacious and longstanding leadership. It has made a difference. [Applause.]

Our next witness will be Lhadon Tethong, who is co-founder and director of the Tibet Action Institute, where she leads a team of technologists and rights advocates developing open-source technologies, strategies, and training programs for Tibetans and others living under extreme repression. Formerly the executive director of Students for a Free Tibet International, she led the campaign against the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

I’d note parenthetically that Frank Wolf and I tried very hard to get the IOC first not to award it, and then we went a couple weeks before and told everyone, including our own embassy, what a farce it was for all of these politicians to be flocking to that 2008 Olympics. And I would say ditto for the one that just occurred. You don’t become complicit in an IOC event when a genocide is occurring in real time. Now we’ve had another Olympics occurring during a genocide.

Ms. Tethong has testified before this Commission in the past. She has received a number of awards, including the James Lawson Award for nonviolent achievement from the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict in 2011, and accepted the Democracy Award from the National Endowment for Democracy on behalf of the Tibet Action Institute in 2018.

Tenzin Dorjee is a senior researcher and strategist at the Tibet Action Institute and is a doctoral candidate at Columbia University’s Department of Political Science, focusing on the efficacy of nonviolent resistance strategies and the influence of religion. He has held leadership and programmatic roles at a number of organizations, including the National Endowment for Democracy and Students for a Free Tibet. Tendor, as he’s known to many of us, is the author of *The Tibetan Nonviolent Struggle: A Strategic and Historical Analysis*. His writings have appeared in the Washington Post, Foreign Policy, the Journal of Democracy, National Interest, Tibetan Review, and the Oxford Encyclopedia of Politics and Religion. He also testified before our Commission just a couple of years ago.

So I would like to now ask if we could hear from Penpa Tsering for such time as he may consume. [Applause.]

**STATEMENT OF PENPA TSERING, SIKYONG,  
CENTRAL TIBETAN ADMINISTRATION**

SIKYONG PENPA TSERING. Thank you. Thank you very much, Chairman Smith, Chairman Merkley, members, other distinguished guests. Thank you very much for inviting me for this hearing. And I'm very much encouraged by the presence of Special Coordinator for Tibet Under Secretary Uzra Zeya, who has been very diligently and wholeheartedly fulfilling her responsibilities as special coordinator for Tibet.

And I'm also very happy to be present here alongside a person who continues to play a very significant role in keeping the hopes of the Tibetan people alive, and someone whom I hold very dear, Mr. Richard Gere, chairman of the International Campaign for Tibet. You have also invited two prominent Tibetans, Lhadon Tethong and Tenzin Dorjee of the Tibet Action Institute. As you mentioned before, both are very competent in their leadership and they're now known for their research on challenges confronting Tibetans inside Tibet, including the colonial-style boarding schools. With them speaking in detail on some of the specific issues, I request that the chairs consider my written submission as part of the testimony, which covers almost all the events over the last year.

And as the democratically elected leader of the Tibetan people, the Central Tibetan Administration, of which I am the Sikyong, is fully committed to following the Middle Way Policy, the way forward shown by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and adopted by the Tibetan parliament-in-exile. This policy is aimed at finding a non-violent, mutually beneficial, negotiated, and lasting solution to the Sino-Tibet conflict that can set an example to this violence-ridden world. Resolution to the Sino-Tibet conflict can have profound geopolitical implications for a more peaceful and secure region and world.

The absence of traction on dialogue since 2010 sounds ominous, but we remain positive about finding a peaceful solution to the Sino-Tibet conflict that avoids extreme polarities. The sincerity of the People's Republic of China's leadership manifests in the policies and programs being implemented in Tibet as we speak. In the last few years, evidence has been emerging from Tibet in the form of reports by the U.N., the independent institutes, and scholarly research. The Chinese government's one nation, one language, one culture, and one religion policy is aimed at forced assimilation and the erasure of Tibetan national identity and other minority nationalities.

Unsurprisingly, the international watchdog Freedom House lists Tibet as one of the least free countries in the world, alongside Syria and South Sudan. We often get asked why we don't hear about Tibet anymore—the PRC's Orwellian gridlock system, the use of all means of artificial intelligence, as the chairs mentioned, to surveil people, to control the flow of information, and the lockdown of Tibet to the outside world; even those in leadership roles in education, religion, culture, and environment are being arbitrarily arrested or they just disappear.

One's actions are linked to the welfare of one's near and dear ones. One hundred fifty-seven Tibetans are known to have self-immolated since 2009, hoping against hope that the PRC government would pay some attention to their plight, and hoping against hope that the international community would come to their rescue, but to no avail. The Chinese government focuses too much on development and fails to understand the real aspirations of the Tibetan people. Tibetan language, religion, and culture are the bedrock of Tibetan identity. Compassion and nonviolence, which form the foundation of our culture, will undoubtedly promote peace and harmony in the world.

However, Tibetan identity is facing unprecedented threat of eradication. The atheist Chinese government is trying to fully control the process and authority of recognizing the reincarnation of trulkus, or living Buddhas, as they are known, that is unique to Tibetan Buddhism, along with interference in the study of Buddhist philosophy and control over their movement. To speed up assimilation, large-scale forced relocation of Tibetans from their traditional homeland to Chinese territories—and within Tibet—and the mass transfer of Tibetan youth to China, all these Tibetans are being moved to areas that are not of their traditional culture.

As part of the fifty-year Western Development Program, started at the beginning of this millennium, unscrupulous use of natural resources and reckless construction of dams, railways, and road networks, airports, and other infrastructure in Tibet threaten irreversible damage to Tibet's fragile environment. Tibet is known as Asia's Water Tower and the Third Pole because of the amount of glaciers and permafrost that feeds all the major rivers of Asia. Therefore, it concerns not only Tibet and the Tibetan people but has serious implications for the food, economic, and water security of a population of about 2 billion people downstream. If the PRC is not made to reverse or change its current policies, Tibet and Tibetans will definitely die a slow death.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Commission, I would like to express appreciation for your organizing this very important hearing. These hearings are a boost to the indomitable spirit of the Tibetans inside Tibet and source of inspiration for the Tibetans in exile to continue with our just struggle. I wish to reiterate our gratitude to the U.S. Congress for making necessary changes to the Tibet Policy Act. The continuous support from Congress, the government, and the people of the United States will enable the resolution of the Sino-Tibet conflict through the Middle Way Policy, which will bring peace to Tibet and beyond. I fervently hope that the Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Conflict Act, introduced in both houses of the U.S. Congress, will be made into law. Thank you very much for this opportunity again. [Applause.]

Chair SMITH. I want to thank the Sikyong for his very powerful testimony. And the reason we've called this hearing is to begin to act as a pivot. Yes, there's focus on Hong Kong. There's focus on Taiwan. There's focus on what's happening to the Uyghurs and the genocide against the Muslims living there. But we cannot take our eyes off the ongoing genocide being committed against the Tibetan people. And the Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Conflict Act, authored by my good friend to my left and by the ranking

member, the former chairman of the Commission, who couldn't make it here today—he had other important things to be at—that becomes the pivot. That we reengage. So this testimony and this hearing and, again, that legislation, is critical to engaging as never before on Tibet.

So I want to yield such time as he may consume to Richard Gere.

**STATEMENT OF RICHARD GERE,  
INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET**

Mr. GERE. Thank you. Thank you very much. I'm very moved by what I'm hearing here today. I'm always incredibly moved at these hearings because it's—Congressman Nunn, we haven't met before, but I'm astonished by the power and the profundity and intelligence of your discussion with us today and your experience. So thank you for being part of this. Thank you, Chairman Smith, as always. Senator Merkley, thank you so much for your continued support for these important things. Representative Steel, who spoke, thank you very much. And Under Secretary Uzra Zeya, thank you so much for speaking here today.

I'm here—my motivation is clear—for the Tibetan people, the Tibetan brothers and sisters that I've known for 45 years. It was 45 years ago that I wandered into a refugee camp in Nepal and was astonished by these extraordinary people. And the little that I've been able to help them in the meantime I think has only to a very small degree repaid what they have given me over the last 45 years. So I'd like to acknowledge our Tibetan brothers and sisters in the room right now. Thank you so much. [Applause.]

And this Tibetan community has been extraordinarily successful; I've seen them all over the world. Obviously in India, Nepal, Bhutan, other places in Asia, but also in Europe and in the U.S. And this wonderful, vibrant Tibetan community in the U.S., many of them citizens, is an extraordinary addition to the American dream and experiment. And I think as we've seen, the contribution they've given us is something unique. The commitment to nonviolence, the commitment to wisdom and compassion, is something that we sorely need.

Chairman Smith, I'd just like to acknowledge, "First Knight," a movie that I made which you referenced, when I had very long black hair. [Laughter.] And I'm going to go back and look at that again myself to remember who I was. [Laughter.]

For decades, as we know, the Chinese Communist Party's ethnic policies have been largely predicated on containment, denial, destruction, and assimilation. Repression has been most severe in Tibet, and in East Turkestan with our Uyghur friends it should be noted as well, where the CCP policies have included the separation of families, the prohibition of language, the destruction of religious sites and institutions, the collection of DNA, and a pervasive surveillance system to which the denial of information of movement is implemented. I think we well know now that the surveillance budget in China exceeds their military budget.

I obviously do not have to explain this threat to the Tibetan people's very existence to this Commission, who likely know decades of atrocities behind the CCP's ethnic policies better than I do and have spoken so eloquently about them today. Thank you. But brief-

ly, in service of Beijing's longstanding agenda to sinicize Tibet and "manage" individual nationalities, the Chinese Communist Party's policies have been characterized by cruelty, collective violence, and extreme persecution.

The saddest truth is that the CCP's process of assimilation and erasure is all too often concealed by Beijing's intricate and powerful propaganda machine. Within China's digital prison, just like all authoritarian regimes, the Chinese government targets the very core attributes that define the continuity of a people, specifically the family unit, religious expression, cultural tradition, language, and environment—land. Literally, this was a land grab, a land steal by the Chinese side.

Identifiable mechanisms, like arbitrary detention, forcible transfer, rape, torture, and disappearance are all tools that have been well documented throughout the course of Beijing's assimilation practices. Xi Jinping's recent appointment of Pan Yue to the Central Committee is likely an indication of this aggressive assimilationism that will not only continue but surely intensify. And if the Beijing chairman's recent visit to Moscow is any indicator of a new era, every one of China's 55 ethnic groups—including Tibetans, Uyghurs, Mongolians—are right to be extremely afraid.

It does not have to be this way. As you know, the Dalai Lama has offered countless ways over many, many decades, since the 1950s, a pathway to resolution built on a dialogue process meant to identify a peaceful and stable resolution in Tibet which grants Tibetans meaningful autonomy within the framework of the Chinese constitution. And just as a sidebar, when the talks broke down between the Chinese and the Tibetans—I think it was about 13 years ago—it was because the Tibetan side brought to the discussion the Chinese constitution, and their suggestions for compromise were based on the Chinese constitution itself. The Chinese walked out and refused to resume discussion. So it's clear where they were coming from.

It's obvious why a mutual agreement is crucial to Tibet's survival and the avoiding of the eradication of the Tibetan people, though it might be much less clear to Beijing how this benefits them. There are three key elements of benefit to them. First, it lends Beijing the legitimacy that it so desperately seeks in Tibet, and which it's never had. Second, it enables Beijing to reset the relationship with India. And third, if successfully implemented, a reciprocal agreement in Tibet removes or perhaps lessens the international stigma associated with Beijing's abysmal human rights record. Ranging from acts of genocide, like those determined by the International Committee of Jurists in 1960 to present-day criticism of Beijing's longstanding brutality in Tibet and East Turkestan, which has only intensified after the 2008 Tibetan uprising, which has been followed by years of self-immolation sacrifices from the Tibetan people in protest of the Chinese government's violent rule.

I would like to ask the Commission to remember Tsewang Norbu, a very popular Tibetan singer, who self-immolated last year in Lhasa. Demonstrating a peaceful agreement in Tibet, which includes the rights of the child, the right to mother tongue, freedom of movement and religious practice, would be a powerful step up

for Beijing, sending the entire world the right signal that the Chinese government is genuinely capable of addressing discord through dialogue, with reason and a peaceable human value, rather than the demonstration of brute force and denial.

Two steps must be taken to help this happen. First, we must be clear about the history of the People's Republic of China in Tibet that brought us to this point. Second, the United States, allies, and the international community must speak with a unified voice. For me, this is the most important thing. The U.S. Congress and the U.S. people have done extraordinary things. But we can only do so much alone. We have to engage our European likeminded partners in a unified voice against this Chinese oppression.

For the record, the Chinese Communist Party invaded Tibet without any provocation whatsoever, and actually at the suggestion of Stalin at the time, in 1949–1950. The CCP consolidated control over the Tibetan minority nationality, which obviously was not a minority of Tibetans. It was all Tibetans. The Chinese had been thrown out of Tibet at that point. The CCP violated human rights standards and contravened its own policy promises to respect Tibetan institutions, Tibet's religion, and the Tibetan peoples' right to self-determination.

Open uprising in 1959—March 10th, 1959—and the Dalai Lama's harrowing escape to India, where he and many additional Tibetans sought refuge, and thanks to the generosity of India remain harbored, where the Tibetan community has become a vibrant and beloved thread in India's pluralistic democracy. During the next two decades, the denial and destruction of Tibetan culture, religion, and language, arbitrary detention and torture is estimated by the Tibetan government-in-exile to have resulted in the deaths of 1.2 million Tibetans, one-fifth of the country's population.

Many more Tibetans languished in prisons and labor camps. Many of them I knew personally. In fact, there was an extraordinary Lama, Ribur Rinpoche, who lived with me for the last several years of his life, who had spent 20 years in solitary confinement. Many more Tibetans languished in these prisons. The stories go on and on. Historic buildings were destroyed, monastic temples, 6,000 monasteries destroyed. Literally thousands of ancient Buddhist texts, critical to the legacy of Tibetan Buddhism and the broader Buddhist community, were burned, looted, or lost in the zealotry of the Cultural Revolution.

Tibetans were collectivized, leading to unprecedented famine—which was really unheard of before—in the PRC. (This also happened to Chinese people themselves, it should be noted.) The PRC sought to thoroughly erase identity or any resistance. Other than specific methodologies—first honed in Tibet, now refined and in well-documented practice against the Uyghurs in East Turkestan—not much has changed. But the pattern, however, gives reason for grave concern that it increasingly expands to match the definition of crimes against humanity. Crimes against humanity.

Despite being bound by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—which they are signatories to—the ICCPR, the Child Rights Convention, and others, Beijing has never demonstrated the standards defined within them in any concrete terms, which makes a mockery of its very vocal claim that China is committed to

human rights and the rule of law. Beijing's assault on Tibetan Buddhism has evolved since its invasion of Tibet and in recent years, exponentially so under Chairman Xi's rule. CCP policy has transitioned from total destruction of Tibetan religious institutions, gatherings, and practices to one of control, including eliminating core attributes of Tibetan Buddhism while co-opting Tibetan Buddhists' right to determine their own leaders.

Tibetans who peacefully oppose this are often detained, routinely tortured, permanently injured, or even killed for the peaceful practice of their religion. Reinforcing that point, the U.N. Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights expressed concern about "reports of systematic and massive destruction of religious sites such as mosques, monasteries, shrines, and cemeteries, particularly in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and in the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region."

However, we must draw a line when the Chinese state will require that Tibetan Buddhist monks receive Communist state approval before reincarnating—a demand that's so grossly antithetical to Tibetan Buddhist precepts that it cannot be justified by flimsy or falsified historical claims of a Communist government professing to be atheist. It's clearly ridiculous. The most visible demonstration of Beijing's aggressive assertion of authority over selecting the next, 15th, Dalai Lama must be opposed.

And we must note as a cautionary tale the first aggression by Beijing during the selection of the 11th Panchen Lama, literally kidnapping the child that had been identified by the Panchen Lama when he was six years old, and then propping up a state-sponsored impostor into the Tibetan reincarnation's empty seat. I remember this moment quite well. I think I was in Dharamshala when this happened. And there was a photograph of this boy, the last photograph that was taken, that's been circulating ever since. The child has not been seen. We don't know if he's alive. His parents, his whole entire family was also kidnapped. They have not been seen since.

As we've learned from the Tibet Action Institute's recent and very valuable research, up to one million Tibetan children are currently and systematically being alienated from Tibetan language and culture in compulsory boarding schools. The Chinese government's educational policies separate children from their families, forcibly transferring the children into schools far from their parents. Children are taught in Mandarin, as the CCP is keenly aware that mother tongue is a primary mode of cultural transmission, one of the most fundamental components of the continuity of a people's identity from one generation to the next, affecting everything from access to the arts, literature, song, and religious texts.

They also know that it's one of the last impasses for their control of Tibet and of the Tibetan people. Uprooting native language is particularly egregious in the case of Tibetan culture, considering the role that memorization and recitation play in the rigorous monastic education system of Tibet. And if the CCP's program to sever the transmission of Tibetan language and culture to Tibetan youth proves successful, it will significantly advance the PRC's agenda to contain and assimilate the entire people.

In its concluding observations on the recent third periodic report on China, the U.N. Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural rights expressed concern about reports “of the large-scale campaign to eradicate Tibetan culture and language, as well as the general undermining of the linguistic identity of ethnic minorities by the assimilation policy of the state party, including the coercive residential boarding school system imposed on Tibetan children.” Lhadon’s going to be speaking much more about this. I’m sure you’ll hear more details about that.

As we argue the risks to freedom associated with apps like TikTok, the CCP’s vicious aim at the future of Tibetan children should send the world a distress signal of the systematic and often secret ruthlessness under which Beijing operates.

I hope the Commission will also note the forcible population transfer of nomads in Tibet. Having thrived for millennia herding and cultivating the vast and incredibly valuable and sensitive Tibetan Plateau and being acclimated to Tibet’s unique climate, nomads are proven stewards of the land. Really, no one knows that better than the Tibetans, and especially these nomads. The Chinese have no experience there.

Their culture is deeply tied to the environment’s demands through a profound belief system that honors landscapes and all living beings. However, the Chinese government is systematically expelling nomads from ancestral lands through forced migration, and transfers them into concentrated sedentary dwellings. Dispossessed of their way of life and ability to make a living, the result is tantamount to the ghettoization of Tibet.

According to Chinese state media, at least 1.8 million nomads have been transferred into these sedentary houses under government policies. This estimate is likely extremely conservative. In 2013, Human Rights Watch reported that over two million Tibetans—two thirds of the entire population of the TAR—had been “re-housed,” with hundreds of thousands of nomadic herders forced into “New Socialist Villages.” Tibetans are not compensated or guaranteed income or employment when resettled. To the contrary, they’re often coerced or forced into work programs that a U.N. special rapporteur reported may “amount to contemporary forms of slavery including excessive surveillance, abusive living and working conditions, restriction of movement through internment, threats, physical and/or sexual violence, and other inhuman or degrading treatment. Some instances may amount to enslavement as a crime against humanity, meriting a further independent analysis.”

CCP surveillance in Tibet is pervasive at all levels of society. Beijing’s matrix of technology, which is heavily invested in and finely tuned, monitors the movements, phone calls, and internet habits of every citizen. The most minor offenses can lead to imprisonment, torture, and even death. Information control, internet blackouts, and invasive digital surveillance feed a massive state of control in Tibet. We’ve recently witnessed the emergence of CCP police departments in the shadows of democratic cities throughout the world. It’s astonishing. We know the surveillance extends far beyond Tibet’s borders.

Within China, Chinese tech firms have developed software to detect and track Tibetans and other “ethnic minorities” within the PRC. A report published by Citizen Lab finds that China’s policy in the Tibet Autonomous Region has gathered between 920,000 and 1.2 million DNA samples in the Tibet Autonomous Region over the past six years. These figures represent a quarter to a third of the total population of the TAR. Human Rights Watch also details Chinese authorities systematically collecting DNA from residents of the TAR, including blood from children as young as five years old without parental consent. Can you imagine this with your own children, with our own children, our grandchildren? Unthinkable.

This reminds us of East German Stasi methods, which horrified us all. Families were encouraged to spy and report on each other, often through coercion or financial incentives. I hope the Commission will note the dangerous pattern of death due to torture that has been observed, including the recent deaths of 19-year-old monk Tenzin Nyima and 51-year-old tour guide Kunchok Jinpa. In both cases, as with many others, an investigation into these deaths in custody and the prosecution of those responsible for those deaths, were never undertaken by the Chinese authorities.

I would also like to note for the record Jigme Gyatso, a monk at Labrang monastery who recorded and released a video detailing his torture at the hands of Chinese police. He was sentenced to five years in prison for that video and was released in extremely poor condition. And as a result of his “crime,” Jigme was blacklisted from receiving private medical care until his death last summer.

The appropriation of land often coincides with the persecution of a people. The Chinese annexation of Tibet, the land grab, and Beijing’s plunder of Tibet’s abundant natural resources have significant regional security implications as well. One of the most illustrative examples is water. China is water-poor. In contrast, the Tibetan Plateau is the source of the entire region’s major rivers that at least 1.5 billion people rely on for food and economic development. The PRC has erected numerous massive damming projects and continues with extensive plans for water diversion. China’s occupation of Tibet provides necessary resources to China, while allowing Beijing to control the tap for South and Southeast Asia. This is a very, very important factor. This is security for the entire world we’re playing with here.

Precious metals and minerals serve as another example. Tibet’s occupation provides access to 126 different minerals, including copper, iron, uranium, zinc, gold, and lead. Tibet also has large amounts of lithium that’s critical to powering modern technologies like cellphones and hybrid and electric cars. Tibet’s location and scale also provide a commanding position for the entire Himalayan region, a fact certainly not lost on the Communist Party. We’ve witnessed deadly skirmishes between the Chinese and the Indians in Arunachal Pradesh, where the People’s Liberation Army encroaches on Indian borders and continues to antagonize stability in the region.

Resource exploitation and environmental appropriation of the plateau overlay a thick blanket of repression over Tibetans who call it home. Voicing or communicating concern over these policies puts Tibetan lives at risk of detainment, disappearance, and worse.

And so fear permeates the plateau, leaving Tibetans silenced. This is how Tibetan people survive in occupied Tibet, in fear and silence. According to international law, people deserve the right to determine their own future. The Tibetan people's call for dialogue with the People's Republic of China is an urgent cry for self-determination, to protect Tibet's unique culture, religion, and linguistic and environmental heritage.

This cry has been going on now for decades. While self-determination does not carry a single definition, the Tibetan people have proposed a way forward toward self-determination and meaningful autonomy within the framework of the Chinese constitution in a reciprocal proposal of compromise based on protecting the core interests of both Tibet and China. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has presented multiple documents over these many decades that provide a concrete framework for negotiation. Yet in contrast, Beijing refuses to return to the table.

Thirteen years have passed since the last Sino-Tibetan dialogue. Although the U.S. routinely calls for the resumption of dialogue—in fact it's the law of the land now—the Tibet Policy Act of 2002 requires a resumption of dialogue—and has made multiple laws stating support for dialogue, the CCP ignores it and ignores any likeminded nations calling for that same dialogue. Such a strategy must be called out. China must return to the negotiating table at the highest level immediately.

And these are the policy recommendations going forward: Pass H.R. 533/S. 138, which has been discussed. A very, very important piece of legislation. And work with the administration to clarify U.S. support for the Tibetan people and negotiations with the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan leadership. This is essential—completely essential—to long-term support for the Tibetans' call for self-determination.

Number two, the implementation of the Tibetan Policy and Support Act and the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act. These were really important things that Congress passed over the last years in both houses. And we have to make sure that they are implemented—and follow through—all of us. Go to the State Department and say: What have you done? We need the report. By law, this is something you have to do. They need that encouragement.

Follow the U.N. Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights in its concluding observations. They call on Chinese authorities to immediately abolish the colonial boarding school system imposed on Tibetan children, allow private Tibetan schools to be established, and ensure that Tibetan is the language of instruction in Tibet. Also, utilize the U.S. vote in the U.N. and optimize like-minded countries to press Central Committee members to halt the expulsion of nomadic herders, rural residents, and small-scale farmers from ancestral lands. Also publish a comprehensive report on the CCP's propaganda efforts in China and in international forums to manipulate global perceptions of Tibet, Tibetan Buddhism, and His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

The Chinese version of history is a complete fantasy. And the decades of that fantasy are not going to change the reality of the truth. It's very important for us, as free-speaking peoples, to tell the truth about the history. And the history is clear for anyone to

see. Monitor the CCP's digital transnational oppression, international police presence, and evaluate the rights violations both in China and in other countries. And, finally, implement concrete restrictions for technology transfer and U.S. company support for forced or coerced DNA and medical data collection.

I really want to thank the Commission and everyone here for listening to this very long testimony. [Laughter, applause.] Everyone here knows this already, but maybe someone else listening to this hearing or reading it will hear it for the first time. It's an overview that I think my partners to my left are going into in more detail. So thank you all very much.

Chair SMITH. Thank you so much. Mr. Gere, thank you for that tremendous testimony. [Applause.] It is comprehensive, informative, motivating, and it gives us so much to act upon. And the historical perspective as well is just extraordinary. Thank you so very much.

Ms. Tethong.

**STATEMENT OF LHADON TETHONG,  
DIRECTOR, TIBET ACTION INSTITUTE**

Ms. TETHONG. Chair Smith, Co-chair Merkley, and other distinguished members of the Commission, thank you for your steadfast and groundbreaking leadership on the Tibetan issue. Thank you for this honor to be able to speak here today.

I just want to start by making it clear that I am speaking of Tibet as Tibetans know it, the entire Tibetan Plateau—900,000 square miles, made up of three historical provinces of U-Tsang, Kham, and Amdo, and with a total Tibetan population of what is today around 7 million Tibetans. China misleadingly claims that there are only 3.2 million Tibetans in Tibet because they count only the Tibetans in the Tibet Autonomous Region. That is central and western Tibet, mostly. They've taken all of eastern Tibet, and they've carved up and sub-fragmented Tibetans and the lands they live on into four Chinese provinces and 12 autonomous prefectures and counties. And in this way they distort and confuse people about what the true picture inside of Tibet is.

For 70 years, generation after generation of Chinese leaders have tried to break the faith and loyalty of the fiercely independent Tibetan people to His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, to Buddhism, and to a distinct Tibetan identity that existed for well over a thousand years before the People's Republic of China was even founded. But after using countless strategies, resources, and unimaginable violence, Xi Jinping now believes the best way for China to conquer Tibet is to kill the Tibetan in the child. He's doing this by taking nearly all Tibetan children away from their families and from the people who will surely transmit this identity to them. Not just their parents, but their spiritual leaders and their teachers. And he's handing them over to agents of the Chinese state to raise them to speak a new language, practice a new culture and religion—that of the Chinese Communist Party.

A little over a year ago, Tibet Action released a report showing that at least 800,000 Tibetan children are now living in a massive network of boarding primary, middle and secondary schools across all of historical Tibet. This shockingly high number means that at

least three out of every four Tibetan children in all of historical Tibet, from ages six to eighteen, are now separated from their families and living in a state-run colonial boarding school system where the medium of instruction and the entire curriculum is focused on fostering loyalty to China. Tibetan is taught as a single language class, if at all, and Tibetan culture is most often reduced to nothing more than dance, song, and tokenized wearing of traditional Tibetan clothing. The practice of Tibetan Buddhism is, of course, strictly prohibited.

China doesn't hide the fact that these schools exist. There's plenty of online propaganda claiming the students in the boarding schools are happy and receiving a modern education. This propaganda nearly always features, very prominently, that single Tibetan language class. But what it hides, and what is not included in our report, is the existence of boarding preschools. Though we were hearing reports from Tibet that parents were being forced to send children as young as four and five away, we could not find any details on where they were being sent or what schooling they were receiving. It was only on the eve of actually releasing our report that we met an expert eyewitness who'd recently fled Tibet and who confirmed the existence of the mandatory boarding preschools for children living in rural areas of Tibet.

Dr. Gyal Lo, a Tibetan academic who holds a Ph.D. from the University of Toronto and has over thirty years of experience in the field of education in Tibet and China estimates that an additional 100,000 to 150,000 Tibetan children, at least, ages four to six years old, now live in these boarding schools. He's visited more than 50 himself. He's seen that the children are required to live there Monday to Friday, where they're immersed in a completely Chinese learning environment, including participating in war reenactments where they're dressed in PLA uniforms or Red Army suits. One Tibetan teacher describes the situation in her area like this: "Usually there are very few Tibetan teachers; the majority are Chinese. So teachers only speak in Mandarin and conduct all school curriculum in Mandarin, including nursery rhymes and bedtime stories." When the children join primary school, hardly any of them can speak Tibetan.

Dr. Gyal Lo witnessed the impact of these preschools in his own family when, after just three months of being in one, children in his family who'd grown up in an entirely Tibetan-speaking household preferred to speak in Chinese. He saw them growing emotionally distant from their parents and grandparents and acting like, as he says, guests or strangers in their own home. Imagine your loved ones at this age and try to imagine the heartbreak that this is causing for these families. I have a six-year-old, and three-year-old twins, so I am right now fully immersed in this period of childhood development. Kids at this stage need the care of their parents and their families to help them eat, bathe, get dressed, and maybe even more importantly, to scare away the monsters at night, to comfort them when they're sick or hurt, and to reassure them that everything is going to be okay.

Tibetan parents don't want to send their kids away, and most wouldn't if they had a choice. Some parents refuse, and many more want to, but China's repression makes the price of resistance ex-

tremely high. In order to avoid sending kids away, some families split up, sending one parent to live with the child in an urban area where they can attend a day school and other parents report sleeping in cars near the boarding preschools just so that they can be close to the kids at all times. And, of course, the children are suffering too. Research by scholars in China and Tibet clearly shows that the removal of Tibetan children from their homes, as well as the highly regimented and isolating boarding school life, is traumatizing Tibetan children. Firsthand accounts of Tibetans who attended boarding schools in Tibet show that pervasive racism and discrimination will inevitably lead them to develop feelings of shame and ethnic inferiority.

These impacts in Tibet sound hauntingly similar to the residential boarding school systems used to eliminate Indigenous identities in Canada, the U.S., Australia, and beyond. This is because Chinese leaders are pursuing the same strategy for the same reasons in Tibet, East Turkistan, and Southern Mongolia, to quell resistance and to consolidate China's rule over foreign lands and peoples. And while Chinese officials argue that the schools in Tibet are fundamentally different from boarding schools of the colonial era—in part because students get to attend schools with modern facilities—they miss the point entirely that what matters is what Tibetans want for their children. And Dr. Gyal Lo likes to simplify this issue in another way, by saying, “It is not about how good the school facilities are, but what is happening inside. The fundamental question is: Who is teaching what to whom?”

And in Tibet, the answer is clear. The Chinese state is removing Tibetan children from their homes by force or coercion and placing them in schools where they have to speak Chinese, conform to Chinese culture and tradition, while stripping them of their own identity, including their religion and their mother tongue. If this is not colonial education, I don't know what is. And when viewed together with the all-out attack on Buddhism and the nomadic way of life, we can see China intends to destroy everything that makes Tibetans Tibetan. And calling it “ethnic unity” or “ethnic fusion” or assimilation or sinicization doesn't make it different, or any less colonial, than what was done by Canada, the U.S., and Australia to the First Nations, Indigenous, and Aboriginal people.

And what it is is crystal clear to Tibetans. Just as it's clear to Uyghurs and Southern Mongolians—China's committing genocide in Tibet. And at a time when our nations are finally reckoning with these atrocities, that Xi Jinping is pursuing a strategy targeting children for the elimination of language and culture—a colonial strategy now reviled and condemned around the world—should be, along with the Uyghur genocide, a massive red flag for the international community of the true nature and intention of the Chinese Communist Party. But this doesn't have to be the end of the story. Tibetans inside Tibet have not stopped fighting. We hear the stories of their resistance every single day. And our Uyghur, Southern Mongolian, Hong Kong, and Chinese activist brothers and sisters are fighting, too. Now is the critical time for the world to step up and help.

I'll end there and address my recommendations in the Q&A.  
Chair SMITH. Thank you. [Applause.]

Thank you for those very powerful insights and the warnings as to what Xi Jinping and the Chinese Communist Party is doing to the children. I look forward to posing some questions to delve even further into that. Thank you so very much.

I'd like to now recognize Mr. Dorjee.

**STATEMENT OF TENZIN DORJEE, SENIOR RESEARCHER AND STRATEGIST, TIBET ACTION INSTITUTE**

Mr. DORJEE. Thank you so much, Chairman Smith. Thank you, Co-chair Merkley, and I want to thank all the CECC staff for organizing this important hearing on Tibet. It's a great honor to speak here next to my colleagues, and especially speaking alongside the democratically elected prime minister of Tibet in exile, Sikyong Penpa Tsering. It's also very inspiring to be here in this room today with some of the most active members of the Tibetan movement, who are right here in this room, especially one of the most inspiring heroes of the Tibetan movement, former political prisoner Ngawang Sangdrol. I just saw her sitting over there. [Applause.] Ngawang Sangdrol started fighting for Tibet when she was 12 or 13 years old and went to Chinese prison for simply participating in a nonviolent protest. Today she's still out here fighting for the same cause.

Oppression produces exile. All oppressed nations have a blessing called diaspora, where stateless exiles are able to enjoy freedom of expression, religion, assembly, and association that they are denied back home. Once upon a time, Tibetans in the diaspora also enjoyed these freedoms. But in the last decade, many of these freedoms have succumbed to the long arm of the Chinese government. From Nepal and India to Sweden and Switzerland, and now even in Canada and the United States, formal and informal agents of the Chinese government are using some of the oldest tactics of manipulation and some of the newest technologies of repression to bully, threaten, harass, and intimidate Tibetans into silence.

To fully grasp why and how China's apparatus of transnational repression targets Tibetans, we must understand its origins. China has historically viewed the Tibetan diaspora as a leading threat to its global reputation. In the nineties, the international Tibet movement was quite successful at exposing China's human rights violations and generating bad PR for the regime. This was undermining Beijing's foreign policy objectives. It was during this period that the Chinese government launched a new campaign to clean up its global image. But instead of improving its human rights record on the ground, Beijing decided to go after the Tibet movement abroad.

China proceeded to develop a sophisticated set of tools, tactics, and strategies to silence not only Tibetans but also pro-Tibet voices on the international scene. This multiyear project to dislodge Tibet from the global agenda and erase it from public consciousness targets students, activists, artists, academics, former political prisoners, and many elite institutions. Some of my own friends and colleagues in Canada and the United States have gone through traumatizing experiences as a result of being targeted either directly by Beijing or by online mobs of Chinese nationalists, who are often acting at the behest of the Chinese consulate.

One strategy that Beijing employs with devastating effectiveness is the relationship mapping that links individuals in the diaspora to their families in Tibet. This mapping of family connections allows Chinese authorities to use the fate of relatives back home in Tibet as a pawn to blackmail exiled Tibetans into silence. Two years ago, I interviewed a Tibetan American in New York who had visited Tibet to see her aging parents. She told me how toward the end of her trip, her minders from the United Front explicitly told her that her political behavior going forward would determine not only her future chances of getting a visa, but also the safety and well-being of her family in Tibet. Her parents are basically the hostage, and her silence in exile is the ransom. It's a ransom she must pay every day by refraining from actions, online or offline, that may be perceived as critical of China.

Agents of the United Front or the Chinese consulate unfailingly communicate this exact message to every Tibetan American who visits Tibet or applies for a visa. Most of the time they don't get the visa. This transnational family mapping is designed to manufacture a sense of guilt—call it advance guilt—in the conscience of the exile, making the exile feel that her political participation will endanger her family in Tibet. The ultimate goal of this coercion by proxy is the political deactivation of the exile.

Another common Chinese strategy is the weaponization of funding to depoliticize institutions and demobilize communities. This mechanism is visible in the case of Baimadajie, the self-identified Tibetan NYPD officer who was spying for the Chinese government. Exploiting the power of his NYPD uniform, he was trying to manipulate the leaders of the New York Tibetan community. This is what he was saying to them. He was saying to the Tibetan leaders, "You guys are paying a monthly mortgage of nearly \$50,000 for your community center. I have some very wealthy Chinese friends who can help subsidize your mortgage. But you should stop flying the Tibetan flag at your events, and you should ban any discussion of political issues at this venue."

By dangling the promise of funding before the community leaders, Baimadajie was trying to depoliticize and co-opt one of the most important Tibetan-owned spaces in the diaspora. Beyond targeting Tibetan communities, Beijing has used its tight control over access and funding to shape political discourse on university campuses, in cultural institutions, academic forums, and even to influence the research agenda of budding scholars and aspiring Sinologists. Beijing's apologists out here happily exploit the openness of our democratic systems to defend—ironically—defend the world's largest dictatorship.

Nevertheless, I believe there are ways to fight this. The U.S., and the West in general, has conceded so much ground to China in the last three decades and moved the equilibrium so far in Beijing's favor. It is time to reset the diplomatic baseline and it's time to go back to first principles of the historical truth of Tibetan independence and legal right of the Tibetan people to self-determination. It is time to liberate ourselves from the delusion that sweeping human rights under the rug, or throwing Tibetans and Uyghurs to the wolves, would somehow make China more likely to cooperate on issues of common interest and geopolitical importance.

The best way to counter China's transnational repression is to proactively support the Tibetan, Uyghur, and Hong Kong people's transnational, decolonial advocacy for human rights and self-determination, and strengthen the Chinese people's longstanding struggle for democracy and freedom. Thank you. [Applause.]

Chair SMITH. Thank you very, very much, all of you, for that tremendous testimony. This has to be a pivot. I think your point—you know, we have unfortunately bought into a narrative from Xi Jinping and Hu Jintao, and all the others that preceded them, that somehow if you go along, you get along, you do more trade and things, and matriculate from dictatorship to democracy. Nothing like that has happened. So it's time to pivot. And certainly Tibet policy is a place that is just crying out for a reappraisal and for a new initiative on the part of the U.S. Government, which is why S. 138 and H.R. 533 are so important in that endeavor.

A couple of questions, then I'll yield to the Co-chair for his questions. On the boarding schools, you know, my first human rights trip—I've been to China many times on human rights trips. I never got into Lhasa. Frank Wolf, my colleague, did. I didn't. Couldn't get in. But my first trip was actually to Moscow and Leningrad in 1982, on behalf of Soviet Jews. And I'll never forget being in what is now St. Petersburg, going to a museum on atheism. And I began to learn that the communist ideology either destroys or co-opts all faiths, and all exercises of conscience. You know, right now Xi Jinping is using his sinicization campaign to completely co-opt all faiths and all belief systems, or destroy them.

We went to this museum on atheism. And while we were there, they were mocking Christianity, Judaism, and Islam in Kazan Cathedral, which had been turned into a museum on atheism. While we were there, all these young pioneers, children that were 11, 8, 10, were going by with guides pointing to all of the faith symbols and mocking them—because we got a translation from our people that were taking us through it from the embassy—mocking them like I couldn't believe. And all the children were laughing. Look at this, look at that, how crazy, blah, blah, blah, as they were teaching a militant atheism in the schools.

I'm wondering if you can shed some light on what the consequence of these boarding schools is on the hearts and minds of these children. How long have those schools been in effect? You know, as a tool of repression by the Chinese Communist Party? Do they mock the Dalai Lama there? We know that on the internet if you put the Dalai Lama into a search engine—and I did it, at a Beijing internet café—and didn't get anything but negatives. Unbelievably harsh negatives. And Google was all a part of it. I was on a Google website or search engine in Beijing. And that's the garbage that I got from the censors from the Chinese Communist Party.

And I'm wondering, once they get a child with a very impressionable, malleable mind, what is the impact when they're trashing and mocking the Dalai Lama and Buddhism? Do we know how it's affecting the children? Are they turning against—I mean, how do they resist? And do they have contact with their parents while they're at the boarding school? What is the *modus operandi* there?

Do they come home for summer vacation? I use that in an American context, but do they get time off to see their parents?

Secondly, on the population transfer issue, which, Mr. Gere, you pointed out, I read one of the Dalai Lama's books, and I remember he had a whole section about population transfer as it was happening. And it's only gotten worse as, obviously, indigenous Tibetans are increasingly displaced. They also have used the forced abortion, coercive population control program very effectively as a tool of genocide. We know that. And I'm wondering if you might want to speak to the transfer issue.

And finally, the whole issue of—and you mentioned it, Mr. Dorjee, about the dislodging from the international agenda. You know, there are too many people who just care about the trade so much and about getting along with the Chinese diplomats who are very smooth, except when they are not, in international fora. I've seen that at the U.N. I've seen that at the Human Rights Council in Geneva. And they're bullies if they don't get their way. I went to a press conference that was being held by the Chinese delegation at the U.N. Human Rights Council, and I asked questions, and they closed down the press conference when I got into several human rights issues. And they were all miffed. Before that, they were all talking in superlatives about how great the Chinese human rights record is, which it is not, of course.

So, again, these pieces of legislation, and the prioritization of this by our secretary of state, our ambassador to the United Nations and others—we need to do more to get Tibet further on the agenda. Yes, we have terrible issues with the Uyghurs. We have Hong Kong, Taiwan, all the other terrible, terrible issues. But it can't be at the expense of Tibet. It's got to be reasserted front and center. Maybe you could give us some insight as to how.

Ms. TETHONG. Thank you for those questions. Briefly, restricted access—Tibet is so restricted, so severely restricted, it is nearly impossible to know the exact situation and conditions not just in the schools, but what it is like when the kids go home, because the climate of fear is so incredible. There's really not many people who will talk, or will give us the kind of rich information and eyewitness accounts we used to get when thousands of Tibetans escaped from Tibet every year into India and Nepal. That number, Human Rights Watch had it at about 3,000 average a year until 2008. Now maybe a dozen make it.

Mr. GERE. Or less.

Ms. TETHONG. Even less?

Mr. GERE. Yeah. Oh, yes.

Ms. TETHONG. I mean, it's unbelievable. So we've lost, unfortunately, those rich accounts of what the policy impacts of the Chinese government are inside Tibet. What we do know, though, is that the boarding preschools have only been around since, say, 2016, so those little ones, we really don't know the details of how they're affected by the political indoctrination. We can only assume the worst. The older students in this current sort of system of boarding schools, it's been about a decade or so that they've been being built and really expanded. And we've heard stories, reports of Tibetan students protesting the removal of the Tibetan language in those schools, other things like that that let us know that, of

course, these kids are still Tibetan, and their allegiance to His Holiness the Dalai Lama and to Buddhism will be so deeply ingrained in them that it's unlikely they're participating at that level now. But if this goes on for generations, what does our future look like?

And then as far as how often kids can go home, again, not very often. The preschools seem to allow kids to go home on the weekends. But certainly for the boarding schools that are hundreds and hundreds of miles away, the kids can go home supposedly every few months. Some it's even longer. And many parents can't afford to go get them. So kids will go not home but to a nearby connection or family member, or even have to stay in the school rather than see their families.

Chair SMITH. Could I just ask you, if a parent challenges the child, do they report on them, and then they're disciplined or arrested when the child goes back to the school, or the boarding school and says, Mom and Dad said this—what happens then?

Ms. TETHONG. Oh, yeah, I would assume. You mean, if the parents say anything to the child that the child then reports later? Yeah, absolutely. And that's been the way of Chinese authorities in Tibet for decades.

Mr. DORJEE. If I may add something to what Lhadon was mentioning. The relationship between the children and their parents is already becoming very, very weak and in the process of being cut right now, children being unable or struggling to converse with their parents. It's very much happening. We have heard several accounts and testimonials of this happening right now.

One thing that has already happened to so many families is the relationship between children and their grandparents, because many Tibetan parents speak Tibetan as their first language, but they are able to speak some rudimentary Chinese as a second language in some places. Whereas, when it comes to the older generation of Tibetans who are above 50 or 60, the grandparents' generation, they don't speak any Chinese because there was not a single Chinese in Tibet before 1949, during the invasion years.

And that generation of Tibetans does not speak any Chinese at all. And they still don't, which means many of these children who are in the boarding preschools, they are coming back home when they are able to come during their short breaks in between, and they're not able to say anything, have any kind of communication—forget about conversing with their grandparents. They're not able to have any communication with their grandparents. So the grandparents have already lost the children.

One thing I want to highlight here is the role sometimes—because our societies are so structurally different that we forget the role that grandparents can play in the development of children, their psychology, their worldview, their cultural character. And in Tibetan society, like many traditional societies, grandparents play an extremely foundational role in the development of the children's worldview, psychology, and their fundamental identity. And that's part of the reason why this is particularly dangerous, what's already happening.

I want to add one thing about the second question, China being a bully in so many different scenarios and different arenas. As we all know, nobody likes a bully. But there's nothing worse than a

bully who also plays the victim. And the Chinese government has been extremely good at that. They play the victim everywhere. But what they are actually doing—their real character is that of a bully. And they do this inside Tibet, in East Turkestan. They do it to their own Chinese people who are asking for democracy. And they also do this abroad.

And one way in which all of these issues—whether it's the Uyghur genocide, whether it's the dismantling of democracy in Hong Kong, or whether it's the colonial boarding schools in Tibet—one way that will help us actually be more effective in fighting each of these issues is actually seeing them as a collective whole. Because what the Chinese government is trying to do is isolate each of these issues and get the world to see them as separate issues, so that our list keeps increasing, because China's crimes are increasing, right? There are so many.

So we get overwhelmed just by the length of the list. Whereas I think if we are able to see all of these issues as part of the same root problem of the Chinese Communist Party, which has no legitimacy to rule over a quarter of the world's population, that framework will actually help us visualize a roadmap much more easily to dealing with that.

[Side conversation.]

Mr. GERE. I was just asking if we had any clear numbers of the number of Chinese who have come into Tibetan territory. So we don't have them. But I would assume at this point—I mean, a lot of the work that we did at ICT was to stop the population transfer. And population transfer, in the Geneva Convention, is considered genocide. I think we can make the assumption that there are more Chinese than Tibetans in Tibetan regions at this point. So let's say that there are 7 or 8 million Chinese that are now residents and controlling the Tibetan Plateau.

As you were saying, we get overwhelmed by how vast this Chinese machine is. And, you know, we have to rethink in the West every couple of years what our policies are. And there's an interim period where there's discussion and there's a relaxation of movement. There's no relaxation in China. These policies were set many, many decades ago. And this hundred-year program for the Chinese to take over the world, they're fifty years ahead at this point because they're on point of doing exactly what they set out to do. The mechanisms that they have in place are everywhere now. They're in our universities. They're in our schools. They're in our police departments. They're in the deep structures of our intelligence community. They're everywhere.

And we have to look at this. But as the gentleman said, we can't get overwhelmed by how big it is. We have to be able to parse it piece by piece and look at it. And the things that mean the most to us are our children, frankly. And to look at that the deepest, I think. And this question of continuity of culture, from grandmother, grandfather to child, is deeply important for us. Can we imagine our own kids being devoid of that kind of cultural continuity and transfer of thoughts and emotions, and a sense of who we are in the universe? The Tibetan culture was an experiment of extraordinary visionary possibilities. When Buddhism came to

Tibet in the 7th to 8th century, they were the tough guys in the community.

Tibet at one point controlled all of Asia. They controlled the Mongolians, the Chinese. It wasn't even the Han Chinese at that point. The Han Chinese were a very small, insignificant kingdom that long ago. But Tibet was transformed by Buddhism. They took it seriously. And the institutions were not institutions of generating money or power in a worldly sense, but creating bodhisattvas, perfect human beings who actually generated love and compassion and wisdom. And the institutions of the convents, the nuns, the monasteries were supported by the people. And that's where they gladly sent their kids to be educated and to foster these incredible ideals, which are—I grew up in a Christian household—compassion, love, care for our neighbors. These were important things to us that we had to learn from our parents and our culture.

The Tibetans learned it in the extreme, that this was a life and death struggle between the right path and the wrong path. And the path they chose was love and compassion at all levels of society. The Chinese disrupted that completely in 1949, with this invasion. And it was a very unfortunate but necessary thing for the Dalai Lama to leave. When I first became interested in the Tibetans, I knew very little about the political situation. I was going to go to Tibet.

A friend of mine, John Avedon, had just written a book about the history of Tibet and also the diaspora. He said, why are you going to Tibet? And I said, well, I want to see Tibet. And he said, well, you'll see Chinese there, and you'll see people who are so cowed and fearful. You won't really have an experience there. Go to Dharamshala, see His Holiness there. So I did. And that was really the beginning of my involvement. But it was so stunning to me to see Tibetans living in exile, but within their own communities, with this continuity of culture, they were unique.

And I see it in the community that's sitting here with us today. These people are unique. They're unique on the planet. They're unique in our present society. They have so much to offer us, not just Americans, but the entire planet, of how we can proceed. This breaking of that continuity of love, and compassion, and wisdom is probably the saddest thing that we've seen. I don't care about the money. I don't even care about the natural resources. I care about this continuity of love and compassion. And that's what we've seen broken.

Chair SMITH. You know, I read John Avedon's op-eds in years past, decades ago, one of them called "The Rape of Tibet." And he talked about how forced abortion was used with absolute impunity against the Tibetan women, just to get rid of Tibetans. I mean, it was outrageous. So—

Mr. GERE. Well, to be fair, they use it against their own people.

Chair SMITH. Of course they do.

Mr. GERE. So this discussion was not against the Chinese people, but against a system which is destroying them as well as us.

Chair SMITH. Thank you so much.

Chairman Merkle.

Co-chair MERKLEY. I so much appreciate the testimony that each of you has brought and the experiences that all of you who are at-

tending are bringing to bear in this effort. There's a vote underway in the Senate, so I have a question for each of you but probably if I'm going to make the vote, which I need to, I'll ask that you maybe take two minutes to respond to each question. I want to start with Ms. Tethong.

Noting that in November, on behalf of this executive commission, then-chair McGovern and I sent a letter to the U.N., seeking a U.N. investigation on the separation of Tibetan children from their families to these colonial boarding schools. On March 6th, there was a report that the U.N. Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights did a study. It did not come from the High Commissioner on Human Rights but from the Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. And it very much called for an end to the forced relocations and the state-run boarding schools, and had quite a lot of data.

So one section of the U.N. has pursued an investigation. The question now is, how can we push the U.N. to the next step? What's the most important next step that this Congressional-Executive Commission should push for?

Ms. TETHONG. Thank you for the question and thank you also for your efforts in moving this issue, changing this issue, especially at the U.N. I think if the members of the Commission, Members of Congress could request that the administration really lead a coalition of likeminded countries in opposing colonial boarding schools at the United Nations, at the Human Rights Council, and other international fora, I think that would play a huge part.

This would make such a contribution to, first, getting this issue out there, because it's been hiding—or the Chinese government has been hiding it so effectively. And second, for pushing other countries—giving other countries the support they need to get on board. And I think there are a lot of likeminded nations who have these histories of the residential boarding schools and these kinds of policies, that really have an obligation to lead, together with the U.S., like Canada, like Australia, and others.

Co-chair MERKLEY. Yes. Thank you. And certainly this is an agenda that we can continue to push forward. I look forward to working with you, Mr. Chairman, in that regard. And, Mr. Gere, you talked in your testimony, kind of following on that, how we need a unified voice with our European partners. How can we best amplify these horrific circumstances? As I was saying to Chairman Smith during the testimony, if you're just hearing the story and you weren't already familiar with it, it would sound like a dystopian world, you know, a few centuries from now on some other planet. You know, in some sci-fi novel. All of these horrific circumstances that are going on.

But it's here. It's now. We do know it. We hear it again. And the world becomes somewhat hardened to all of the circumstances that are going awry. How do we build a stronger unified voice with our European partners?

Mr. GERE. Well, I think there's a moment now. I mean, there's high skepticism of China right now. And I think we have to take advantage of that. The Chinese have been very successful in promising separate deals with different countries. There hasn't been a unified effort against China. But I think there is a moment now

where there's a high degree of unhappiness and skepticism, and a feeling of danger and fear of China at this moment which is pretty universal, certainly with our European partners. I think this is the moment for the State Department, for the Commission, for us, for all of us, to make those connections wherever we can.

Mr. McGovern and I have talked about this quite a bit. And Speaker Pelosi also. This, to me, is central to what we can do to actually change things. The U.S. Congress, the U.S. Government, and the U.S. people have been completely supportive of the Tibetan cause. And we continue to be very strong in what we're doing. These bills are very important, very powerful bills that are winding their way through Congress.

The Tibet Support Act of 2002 was huge in declaring support for the Tibetan people and correcting many of the misperceptions through the propaganda of the Chinese government. Now's the time to talk to our equals in Europe, who are friends in Europe, and say: Look, this is the legislation that we have started with. And it's taken us decades to get here, but use us, what we have done, to get similar laws passed, similar legislation done, in the U.K., and France, and Italy. I was on the phone with the Italians today. We're going to be presenting similar legislation in Italy, because there's a government there today that is incredibly skeptical of what the Chinese are doing in the world. So this is a moment to take chances reaching out to our friends around the world.

Co-chair MERKLEY. Thank you, Mr. Gere. And I know this comes from your heart and from decades of advocacy. And we need more American citizens to join you, as we are joining you, in this advocacy. It's just a tremendous effort. And let's seize this moment, as you have suggested.

Mr. Dorjee, you talk about the long arm of the Chinese government and how they are essentially blackmailing Tibetans who are resident in the United States.

Mr. GERE. Citizens!

Co-chair MERKLEY. Tibetans who are citizens here in the United States. And this is a practice they're employing not just with regard to Tibet, but in kind of a broad scope of trying to suppress freedom of speech here, both by threats regarding that person but also even perhaps more effectively, threats against their families back home. And you gave us a very specific example, the name deleted to protect the individual. But it is extraordinarily hard to be an advocate when your family is being threatened. What is the single most effective thing we can do to counter this type of blackmail against Tibetan citizens and Tibetan residents, citizens of the United States, residents here, when their families are threatened back home?

Mr. DORJEE. Thank you so much. I remember about 15 to 20 years ago, America was a very different place, where there would be Chinese students studying overseas, and there were all sorts of students here who were participating in political conversations. When I was an undergrad, actually, on my campus I even saw Chinese students taking part in all the events, going to debates. They would come to Tibet events. They would come to other political events, without fear that somebody was watching over their shoulder. Things have changed a lot.

I sometimes work as a teaching assistant at Columbia University, and what I see on campus, and many campuses these days, is very different. I've spoken to a lot of Chinese students, let alone Tibetan students, and Uyghur students, and Hong Kong students. Even Chinese students who actually have less reason to fear the Chinese government—even they are terrified of taking part in any kind of activity that might be deemed remotely critical or even borderline critical of the Chinese government. And I think maybe we can find a way to make the universities a little bit more responsible to their students.

It's the job of the universities to protect their students, the free speech of the students, the First Amendment rights of the students, to take part in events they'd like to go to, to participate in protests, to take part in dialogue, to actually even meet with Tibetan students without fear. Many Chinese students are actually afraid to meet with people like me, or us, because they don't know who's watching. Because the consulates have actually extended some of their arms and tentacles into the university campuses. And I would really appreciate it if Congress and the administration could look into that particular problem, which is happening across many university campuses. Both private universities and public universities.

And as an immediate measure, establishing some kind of hotline where people can report tips whenever they see these incidents. My friend and colleague who was in Canada actually was subjected to endless harassment and endless hate speech, intimidation; she even received death threats from hundreds of people. And the number of comments that she received, digital harassment, she was really, really traumatized by that experience. And when I was speaking to her just yesterday, she told me her hope is that in the future other people don't have to go through that kind of experience.

Co-chair MERKLEY. I'm so glad you mentioned the hotline. I've been pushing the administration to set up just such a hotline and the reaction so far has been modest. The first response I got was, the FBI wants to just use their standard tipline. And I said, what person being threatened by folks overseas would call up a tipline that has to do with anything in the world, any crime in the world, not knowing how the information will be used, whether the person at the other end speaks Tibetan, or speaks Chinese, or understands how carefully this information has to be controlled, not to amplify the threat.

And if we don't have a way for people to systematically report, then it's just the tip of the iceberg. We're getting, like, maybe a ten-thousandth of what's actually happening in terms of the information we're securing. And I think for us to take on transnational repression, we have to get a huge understanding that there needs to be a transnational repression hotline that is carefully, carefully staffed with multiple language abilities, multiple protections, with such confidence that people know that it's not going to be hacked, that they're not going to amplify the problems by reaching out, that the diaspora communities can circulate that information.

And I think that would help us really see the full picture and be able to mobilize a much more aggressive response. And so I floated

that idea last year. And this is the first time I've heard someone bring it back up before the Commission. And I'm continuing to seek feedback on it and partnership on it, because you can no longer be free here in the United States of America if your family's being threatened abroad.

Mr. DORJEE. Thank you so much.

Co-chair MERKLEY. Thank you. [Applause.]

Chair SMITH. Chairman Merkley, thank you very much. And thank you for that initiative. I think it's a tremendous one. And hopefully it'll go from modest to all in because who wants to call the FBI when you have no idea, as somebody who is part of the diaspora, who you're talking to? You know, law enforcement to them, back home, means secret police and people who are surveilling ad nauseum.

You know, I've actually chaired hearings on Confucius Centers. I had one hearing with NYU, which has a campus in Shanghai, bought and paid for by the Chinese Communist Party. Actually, I invited myself and went over there and spoke on human rights. But, you know, it's shocking how complicit higher education, just like the business community, is with the Chinese Communist Party.

Mr. GERE. Sure. It's all about money.

Chair SMITH. It's all about money.

Mr. GERE. All about money.

Chair SMITH. But thank you for your testimony. This hearing and, again, these bills—which I do believe will be passed and signed into law—need to be the pivot. And your voices and your incredible knowledge and depth of compassion is the motivator. You have helped us to see even more clearly what has to be done. And we need to pivot today. So I thank you so much. [Applause]

Mr. GERE. Thank you, Chairman. [Cheers, applause.]

Chair SMITH. Without objection, all members will have five legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and make submissions. The hearing's adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:00 p.m., the hearing was concluded.]



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## **A P P E N D I X**

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## PREPARED STATEMENTS

## PREPARED STATEMENT OF SIKYONG PENPA TSERING

Chairman Smith, Chairman Merkley, members of the committee and distinguished guests, thank you for inviting me to this hearing alongside a person who continues to play a very significant role in keeping the hopes of the Tibetan people alive and someone I hold dear, Richard Gere, Chairman of the International Campaign for Tibet. You have also invited two prominent Tibetans, Lhadon Tethong and Tenzin Dorjee of the Tibet Action Institute, both competent in leadership and now known for their research on challenges confronting Tibetans inside Tibet, including the colonial-style boarding schools. While they speak in detail on some of the specific issues, I request the chairs consider my written submission as part of the testimony and I assure our Administration's complete cooperation on any additional information that the committee may need.

As the democratically elected leader of the Tibetan people, the Central Tibetan Administration, of which I am the Sikyong, is fully committed to following the Middle Way Policy: the way forward shown by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and adopted by the Tibetan Parliament in Exile. This policy is aimed at finding a non-violent, mutually beneficial, negotiated and lasting solution to the Sino-Tibet conflict that can set an example for this violence-ridden world. Resolution of the Sino-Tibet conflict can have profound geopolitical implications for a more peaceful and secure region and the world.

The absence of traction on dialogue since 2010 sounds ominous, but we remain positive about finding a peaceful solution that avoids extreme polarities. The sincerity of the People's Republic of China's (PRC) leadership manifests in the policies and programs being implemented in Tibet as we speak. In the last few years, evidence emerging out from Tibet in the form of reports by the U.N., independent institutes and scholarly research, the Chinese government's one nation, one language, one culture and one religion policy is aimed at forced assimilation and the erasure of the national identity of the Tibetans and other minority nationalities. Unsurprisingly, the international watchdog Freedom House lists Tibet right at the bottom with Syria and South Sudan in their least free country index.

We often get asked as to why we don't hear about Tibet anymore—the PRC's Orwellian gridlock system, the use of all means of artificial intelligence to surveil people, control of the flow of information, and the lockdown of Tibet to the outside world—even those in leadership roles in education, religion, culture, and environment are being arbitrarily arrested or just disappear. One's actions are linked to the welfare of one's near and dear ones. 157 Tibetans were known to have self-immolated since 2009, hoping against hope that the PRC government would pay some attention to their plight and hoping against hope that the international community would come to their rescue, but to no avail. The Chinese government focuses too much on development and fails to understand the real aspirations of the Tibetan people.

Tibetan language, religion, and culture are the bedrock of Tibetan identity. Compassion and non-violence, which form the foundation of our culture, will undoubtedly promote peace and harmony in the world. However, these are facing unprecedented threat of eradication. The atheist Chinese government is trying to fully control the process and authority of recognizing the reincarnation of Trulkus, that is unique to Tibetan Buddhism, besides interference in the study of Buddhist philosophy and control on their movement.

To speed up assimilation, large-scale forced relocation of Tibetans from their traditional homeland to Chinese territories and within Tibet, the mass transfer of Tibetan youths to China for labor and the incentivized migration of Han Chinese into Tibet are being carried out. Moreover, Tibetan children across Tibet are not only being coerced into colonial boarding schools but transferred to areas across China on a massive scale.

As part of the fifty-year China's Western Development Program started at the beginning of this millennium, unscrupulous use of natural resources and the reckless construction of dams, railway and road networks, airports and other infrastructure in Tibet threatens irreversible damage to Tibet's fragile environment. Tibet is known as Asia's Water Tower and the Third Pole because of the amount of glaciers and permafrost that feeds all the major rivers of Asia. Therefore, it concerns not only Tibet and the Tibetan people but has serious implications for the food, economic, and water security of a population of about 2 billion people living in the downstream countries that depend on rivers originating in the Tibetan plateau.

If the PRC is not made to reverse or change its current policies, Tibet and Tibetans will definitely die a slow death.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I would like to express my appreciation to you for organizing this very important hearing. These hearings are a boost to the indomitable spirit of the Tibetans inside Tibet and a source of inspiration for the Tibetans in exile to continue with our just struggle.

I wish to reiterate our gratitude to the U.S. Congress for making necessary changes to the Tibet Policy Act.

The continuous support from the Congress, government and people of the U.S. will enable the resolution of the Sino-Tibet Conflict through the Middle-Way Policy, which will bring peace to Tibet and beyond. I fervently hope that the Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Conflict Act introduced in both Houses of the U.S. Congress will be made into law.

Thank you very much for the opportunity again.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF RICHARD GERE

HUMAN RIGHTS IN TIBET: SURVIVAL OF A PEOPLE

INTRODUCTION

For decades, the Chinese Communist Party's ethnic policies have been largely predicated on containment, denial, destruction, and assimilation. Repression has been most severe in Tibet—and in East Turkestan it should be noted as well—where CCP policies have included the separation of families, the prohibition of language, the destruction of religious sites and institutions, the collection of DNA, and a pervasive surveillance system through which the denial of information or movement is implemented.

I obviously do not have to explain the threat to the Tibetan people's very existence to this Committee who likely knows of decades of atrocities behind the CCP's "ethnic policies" better than I do.

But briefly, in service to Beijing's longstanding agenda to sinicize Tibet and "manage" individual nationalities, the Chinese Communist Party's policies have been characterized by cruelty, collective violence, and persecution.

The saddest truth is that the CCP's process of assimilation and erasure is all too often concealed by Beijing's intricate and powerful propaganda machine. Within China's digital prison, just like all authoritarian regimes, the Chinese government targets the very core attributes that define the continuity of a people; specifically, the family unit, religious expression, cultural tradition, language, and environment.

Identifiable mechanisms, like arbitrary detention, forcible transfer, rape, torture, and disappearance are all tools that have been well documented throughout the course of Beijing's assimilation practices.

Xi Jinping's recent appointment of Pan Yue to the Central Committee is likely an indication that this aggressive assimilationism will not only continue but perhaps intensify. And if the Beijing Chairman's recent visit to Moscow is any indicator of a "new era," every one of China's 55 ethnic groups—like Tibetans, Uyghurs, and Mongolians—are right to be afraid.

It does not have to be this way. As you know, the Dalai Lama has offered a pathway to resolution built on a dialogue process meant to identify a peaceful, stable resolution in Tibet which grants Tibetans meaningful autonomy within the framework of the Chinese constitution.

It is obvious why a mutual agreement is crucial to Tibet's survival and to avoiding the eradication of the Tibetan people, though it might be less clear to Beijing how this benefits China.

There are three key elements of benefit. First, it lends Beijing the legitimacy it so desperately seeks in Tibet. Second, it enables Beijing to reset its relationship with India and third, if successfully implemented, a reciprocal agreement in Tibet removes—or lessens—the international stigma associated with Beijing's human rights record, ranging from acts of genocide, like those determined by the International Committee of Jurists in 1960, to present-day criticism of Beijing's longstanding brutality in Tibet which has only intensified since the 2008 Tibetan Uprising, which has been followed by years of self-immolation sacrifices by Tibetans in protest of the Chinese government's violent rule. I would ask the Commission to remember Tsewang Norbu, a very popular Tibetan singer who self-immolated last year in Lhasa. Demonstrating a peaceful agreement in Tibet—which includes the rights of the child, the right to mother tongue, the freedom of movement and religious practice—is a powerful step up for Beijing, sending the entire world the right signal that the Chinese government is genuinely capable of addressing discord

through dialogue, with reason and peaceable human values, rather than by the demonstration of force and denial.

Two steps must be taken to help this happen. First, we must be clear about the history that brought us to this point of the People's Republic of China in Tibet. Second, the United States, allies, and the international community must speak with a unified voice on the need for Beijing and its Chairman to return to the negotiating table.

For the record, the Chinese Communist Party invaded Tibet without provocation of any kind in 1949–50. As the CCP consolidated control over the Tibetan “minority nationality,” which obviously was not a “minority” in Tibet at the time, the CCP violated human rights standards and contravened its own policy promises to respect Tibetan institutions, Tibet's religion, and the Tibetan people's right to self-determination. Open resistance to the Communists' violent policies grew quickly, which led to the National Uprising in 1959 and the Dalai Lama's harrowing escape to India, where he and many additional Tibetans sought refuge, and thanks to the generosity of India, remain harbored, where the Tibetan community has become a vibrant, beloved thread in India's pluralistic democracy.

During the next two decades, the denial and destruction of Tibetan culture, religion, and language, and arbitrary detention and torture, is estimated by the Tibetan government in exile to have resulted in the deaths of 1.2 million Tibetans—one-fifth of the country's population.<sup>1</sup> Many more Tibetans languished in prisons and labor camps. More than 6,000 monasteries, temples, and culturally historic buildings were destroyed, their contents pillaged. Literally thousands of ancient Buddhist texts, critical to the legacy of Tibetan Buddhism and the broader Buddhist community, were burned, looted, or lost in the zealotry of the Cultural Revolution. Tibetans were collectivized, leading to unprecedented famine as the CCP sought to so thoroughly erase identity before any resistance mounted.<sup>2</sup>

Other than specific methodologies first honed in Tibet, now refined and in well-documented practice in East Turkestan, not much has changed; the pattern, however, gives reason for grave concern in that it increasingly expands to match the definition of crimes against humanity, as the brazenness of meeting with a comrade recently indicted by the ICC for war crimes, under the diplomatic posture of defining a new world order, might attest.

#### RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION

Despite being bound by the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the ICCPR, the Child Rights Convention and other agreements, Beijing has never demonstrated the standards defined within them in any concrete terms, which makes a mockery of its very vocal claim that China is committed to human rights and the rule of law.

Beijing's assault on Tibetan Buddhism has evolved since its invasion of Tibet and in recent years, exponentially so under Chairman Xi's rule. CCP policy has transitioned from total destruction of Tibetan religious institutions, gatherings, and practices to one of insidious control, including eliminating core attributes of Tibetan Buddhism while co-opting Tibetan Buddhists' right to determine their leaders.

Tibetans who peacefully oppose this are often detained, routinely tortured, permanently injured, or even killed for the peaceful practice of their religion. Reinforcing this point, the U.N. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights expressed concern about “reports of systematic and massive destruction of religious sites such as mosques, monasteries, shrines, and cemeteries, particularly in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and in the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region.”<sup>3</sup>

However, we must draw a line when the Chinese state requires that Tibetan Buddhist monks receive Communist state approval before reincarnating—a demand that is so grossly antithetical to Tibetan Buddhist precepts that it cannot be justified by flimsy or falsified claims of a Communist government professing atheism.

The most visible demonstration of Beijing's aggressive assertion of authority over selecting the next—the 15th—Dalai Lama must be opposed and we must note as a cautionary tale the first aggression by Beijing during the selection of the 11th Panchen Lama—literally kidnapping the child that had been identified as the Panchen Lama when he was six years old, propping up a state-sponsored Lama into the Tibetan reincarnation's empty seat. This is the youngest political prisoner ever and thirty years later no one knows where the real Panchen Lama is, or whether he is even still alive.

#### DESTRUCTION OF LANGUAGE

As we've learned from the Tibet Action Institute's recent and critical research, which we are lucky to have, up to one million Tibetan children are currently and systematically being alienated from Tibetan language and culture in compulsory

boarding schools.<sup>4</sup> The Chinese government's educational policies separate children from their families—forcibly transferring the children into schools far from their parents. Children are taught in Mandarin as the CCP is keenly aware that mother tongue is a primary mode of cultural transmission, one of the most fundamental components of the continuity of a people's identity from one generation to the next, affecting everything from access to arts, literature, song, and religious texts. They also know it is one of the last impasses for their control of Tibet and the Tibetan people.

Uprooting native language is particularly egregious in the case of Tibetan culture considering the role memorization and recitation play in a rigorous monastic education system. If the CCP's program to sever the transmission of Tibetan language and culture to Tibetan youth proves successful, it will significantly advance the PRC's agenda to contain and assimilate a people.

In its Concluding Observations on the recent third periodic report of China, the U.N. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural rights expressed concerns over “reports of the large-scale campaign to eradicate Tibetan culture and language, as well as the general undermining of the linguistic identity of ethnic minorities by the assimilation policy of the State party, known as Sinicization, including the coercive residential (boarding) school system imposed on Tibetan children.”<sup>5</sup>

As we argue the risks and “freedom” associated with apps like TikTok, the CCP's vicious aim at the future of Tibetan children should send the world a distress signal of the systematic and often secret ruthlessness under which Beijing operates.

#### FORCIBLE POPULATION TRANSFER

I hope the Committee will also note the forcible population transfer of nomads in Tibet. Having thrived for millennia herding and cultivating the vast and incredibly valuable Tibetan Plateau and acclimated to Tibet's unique climate, nomads are proven stewards of the land. Their culture is deeply tied to the environment's demands through a profound belief system that honors landscapes and all living beings. According to Chinese government media sources, at least 1.8 million nomads have been transferred into sedentary houses under Chinese government policies. This estimate is likely conservative. In 2013, Human Rights Watch<sup>6</sup> reported that over two million Tibetans (two-thirds of the entire population of the TAR) had been “rehoused,” with hundreds of thousands of nomadic herders forced into “New Socialist Villages.”<sup>7</sup>

Tibetans are not compensated or guaranteed income or employment when resettled. To the contrary, they are often then coerced, or forced, into work programs that a U.N. Special Rapporteur reported may “... amount to contemporary forms of slavery including excessive surveillance, abusive living and working conditions, restriction of movement through internment, threats, physical and/or sexual violence and other inhuman or degrading treatment, some instances may amount to enslavement as a crime against humanity, meriting a further independent analysis.”<sup>8</sup>

It is no secret that the Dalai Lama was the first Nobel Peace Prize winner recognized for environmental efforts in addition to his advocacy for a peaceful resolution in Tibet, another demonstration of why he must be included in dialogue. In contrast to the Dalai Lama's longstanding wisdom on effective environmental policies, the Chinese government systematically expels nomads from ancestral lands through forced migration, transferring them into concentrated, sedentary dwellings.

Dispossessed of their way of life and ability to make a living, the result is tantamount to the ghettoization of Tibet.

#### INSTITUTIONALIZED FEAR

The CCP has converted Tibet into a surveillance state combining more brutal oppressive techniques with a panopticon of technology that monitors the movements, phone calls, and internet habits of every citizen. Constant monitoring and information control, internet blackouts, and intrusive electronic surveillance are now pervasive at all levels of society. Reminiscent of East German Stasi methods, families are encouraged to spy and report on each other, often through coercion or financial incentives.<sup>9</sup> The most minor “offense” can lead to extreme retaliation, including imprisonment and torture.

A dangerous pattern of death due to torture has been observed, including the recent deaths of 19-year-old monk Tenzin Nyima and 51-year-old tour guide Kunchok Jinpa. We emphasize that in both cases, as with many others, an investigation into deaths in custody and prosecution of those responsible for them was never undertaken by the Chinese authorities.

Another example is the recent case of Jigme Gyatso, a monk at Labrang monastery who courageously recorded and released a video detailing his torture at the

hands of Chinese police in 2008. He was sentenced to five years in prison for that video and was released in extremely poor health, leading to steady deterioration and his eventual death last summer. Jigme was blacklisted from receiving private medical care as a result of the “crime” he had committed by speaking out about the abuse he had suffered.<sup>10</sup>

Chinese companies have developed software that automatically detects and tracks Tibetans and other ethnic minorities within the PRC on camera. A report published by Citizen Lab found that China’s police may have gathered between about 920,000 and 1.2 million DNA samples in the Tibet Autonomous Region over the past six years.<sup>11</sup> Those figures represent one-quarter to one-third of the total population of the TAR, which spans most of western Tibet. Human Rights Watch also released a report stating that Chinese authorities are systematically collecting DNA from residents of the TAR, including by taking blood from children as young as five without their parents’ consent.<sup>12</sup>

China’s surveillance no longer halts at the Tibetan border. The CCP’s techno-authoritarianism and fear tactics extend to Tibetan communities abroad. This oppression is being perpetrated behind a digital iron curtain to hide reality on the ground. We also must take seriously the pervasiveness of the surveillance in and outside of Tibet and the harm it’s doing psychologically to the younger generation, who find themselves not only surveilled on platforms such as TikTok, but also harassed for who they are. The development of these systems of repression, reaching all the way around the world, reflects the lengths the CCP will go to to dismantle the Tibetan civilization.

#### POLICY OF PLUNDER

We must also note that the Chinese annexation of Tibet has serious regional security implications and gives Beijing access to Tibet’s abundant natural resources.

Tibet’s location and scale provide a commanding position over the entire Himalayan region, a fact certainly not lost on the Communist Party. The CCP’s occupation allowed not only an immediate enhanced regional sphere of influence but also set it on a trajectory toward the hegemonic control it continues to strive for.

Tibet also boasts a host of natural resources the Chinese lack. One of the most illustrative examples is water. China is water poor. In contrast, the Tibetan Plateau is the source of the region’s major rivers, the healthy flow of which at least 1.5 billion people rely on for food and economic development.<sup>13</sup> The PRC has erected numerous and massive damming projects, and proposes to continue, along with water diversion projects. Once again, we see dual purposes at play. China’s occupation of Tibet provides needed resources to China, while also facilitating infrastructure development that allows it to literally control the tap for South and Southeast Asia. This must not be ignored since water control grants China literal and diplomatic might as well as infrastructure that in and of itself represents yet another potential military build-up along contested borders.<sup>14</sup>

Precious metals and minerals serve as another example. Tibet’s occupation “provides access to 126 different minerals,” including copper, iron, uranium, zinc, gold, and lead. Increasingly relevant, Tibet also has large amounts of lithium, critical to powering modern technologies like cell phones, and hybrid and electric cars, and more.<sup>15</sup>

The appropriation of property often coincides with the persecution of a people. The resource exploitation occurring on the Tibetan Plateau overlays the oppression of the Tibetan people who call it home, and takes place over their objections—clearly stated despite the serious risks associated with protests or demonstrations inside the PRC.

#### PATH FORWARD: THE MIDDLE WAY

At the heart of the Tibet-China conflict lies the fundamental human right of self-determination. According to international law and ethical standards a people deserves the right to determine their own future.

Self-determination does not carry with it any single definition nor does the Dalai Lama’s proposed Middle Way. The Middle Way is based on this foundation of meaningful autonomy even as it represents a proposal of compromise based on protecting the core interests of both Tibet and China.

Under the Middle Way, Tibetans call for dialogue to identify a solution that is compatible with the People’s Republic of China’s constitution while allowing Tibetans the self-determination needed to protect their unique cultural, religious, and linguistic heritage.

There are many aspects to the Middle Way approach that His Holiness the Dalai Lama has presented in multiple documents that provide a concrete framework for

negotiation.<sup>16</sup> The key fact, however, is that at no time has His Holiness or the Tibetan government in exile, the Central Tibetan Administration, explicitly or implicitly signaled that the ongoing occupation is resolved.

In contrast, China refuses to return to the table. To date, thirteen years have passed since the last round of Sino-Tibetan dialogue. Although the United States regularly calls for the resumption of dialogue and has multiple laws on the books stating support for negotiations with His Holiness or his designated representatives as the path forward, the Chinese Communist Party continues to snub its nose at the U.S. and like-minded nations.

China's refusal is transparent. It is simply a waiting game. Beijing has sent numerous signals that it intends to designate its own "Dalai Lama" when the current Dalai Lama passes away. Such a strategy must be thoroughly neutralized in advance.

Accomplishing this will entail two main components. Long term, China must be enticed back to the negotiating table. Ideally, this would mean joining in dialogue with the current Dalai Lama who is well positioned to broker an agreement that will remain stable. However, immediate steps also must be taken to ensure that China, the world, and the Tibetan people know that the United States' support for the Tibetan people and resolution through dialogue will never waver, regardless of with whom or when a true settlement is achieved.

#### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Congress should pass and President Biden should sign the Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Conflict Act (H.R. 533/S. 138) which clarifies that America will back the Tibetan people until negotiations are settled, whether it is with the 14th Dalai Lama or a future Tibetan leader. This is essential to providing the Tibetan people the long-term support needed in their quest for dignity and self-determination. The legislation also empowers the Special Coordinator for Tibet to directly counter China's relentless propaganda machine aimed at Tibet.
- Fully and forcefully implement the Tibetan Policy and Support Act and the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act. The former is a key statute establishing multiple Tibet policies, the latter confronts the inequity of United States citizens (including journalists, tourists, and Tibetan Americans) not being able to enter Tibet, and the ability of Chinese citizens to enter the United States.
- Following the example of the U.N. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in its Concluding Observations, call on Chinese authorities to immediately abolish the boarding school system imposed on Tibetan children, allow private Tibetan schools to be established, and ensure that Mandarin is not the only language allowed as the language of instruction in Tibet.
- Utilize the United States' voice and vote at the United Nations to press Chinese authorities to take all necessary measures to immediately halt expulsion of all nomadic herders, including Tibetan ones, from their ancestral lands. This also should include other rural residents such as small-scale farmers.
- Undertake and present publicly a comprehensive report on the Chinese Communist Party's efforts to manipulate global perceptions of Tibet and His Holiness the Dalai Lama. This should include the countering of China's propaganda machine, digital transnational oppression, and international investment schemes, and the evaluation of human rights violations.
- Set in place concrete restrictions for technology transfer or other U.S company support for forced/coerced DNA or other medical data collection.

[Endnotes appear on the following page.]

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://tibetoffice.org/invasion-after>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Concluding observations on the third periodic report of China, including Hong Kong SAR, China, and Macao SAR, China, p. 13. [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2FC.12%2FCHN%2FCO%2F3&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2FC.12%2FCHN%2FCO%2F3&Lang=en)

<sup>4</sup> “Separated from their Families: China’s Vast System of Colonial Boarding Schools” inside Tibet, Tibet Action Institute, December 2021 [https://s7712.pcdn.co/wpcontent/uploads/2022/12/2021\\_TAI\\_ColonialBoardingSchoolReport\\_Digital.pdf](https://s7712.pcdn.co/wpcontent/uploads/2022/12/2021_TAI_ColonialBoardingSchoolReport_Digital.pdf); and OHCHR, 6 February 2023, “China: UN experts alarmed by separation of 1 million Tibetan children from families and forced assimilation at residential schools.”

<sup>5</sup> OHCHR, 6 February 2023, “China: UN experts alarmed by separation of 1 million Tibetan children from families and forced assimilation at residential schools.”

<sup>6</sup> Human Rights Watch, 27 June 2013, “They Say We Should Be Grateful: Mass Rehousing and Relocation Programs in Tibetan Areas of China,” <https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/06/27/they-say-we-should-be-grateful/mass-rehousing-and-relocation-programs-tibetan>.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/29/beijings-green-fist>

<sup>8</sup> UN Human Rights Council, A/HRC/51/26, “Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences,” Tomoya Obokata, p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.maxhertzberg.co.uk/background/politics/stasi-tactics/#:text=Tactics%20included%20questioning%2C%20repeated%20stop,of%20the%20police%20interest%20etc.>

<sup>10</sup> <https://savetibet.org/prominent-former-tibetan-political-prisoner-dies/>

<sup>11</sup> Citizen Lab, 31 September 2022, “Mass DNA Collection in the Tibet Autonomous Region from 2016–2022,” <https://citizenlab.ca/2022/09/mass-dna-collection-in-the-tibet-autonomous-region/>.

<sup>12</sup> Human Rights Watch, 5 September 2022, “China: New Evidence of Mass DNA Collection in Tibet,” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/09/05/china-new-evidence-mass-dna-collection-tibet>.

<sup>13</sup> <https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781442249134/Water-Peace-and-War-Confronting-the-Global-Water-Crisis-Updated-Edition>

<sup>14</sup> Chellaney, Brahma, *Water: Asia’s New Battle Ground*; Georgetown University Press, 2011, see chapter 3

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 116–117

<sup>16</sup> <https://tibet.net/important-issues/sino-tibetan-dialogue/note-on-the-memorandum-on-genuine-autonomy-for-the-tibetan-people/>

## PREPARED STATEMENT OF LHADON TETHONG

Chair Smith, Co-chair Merkley, and other Distinguished Members of the Commission: Thank you for your steadfast and groundbreaking leadership on the issue of Tibet.

Today, I will speak of Tibet as Tibetans know it: the entire Tibetan plateau—an area of approximately 900,000 square miles—made up of the three traditional provinces of U-Tsang, Kham, and Amdo, and with a total Tibetan population of what is today around seven million people.

China misleadingly claims there are just 3.2 million Tibetans in Tibet because Chinese leaders are counting only those Tibetans in the “Tibet Autonomous Region” or the T.A.R.—that is, mostly central and western Tibet. They’ve taken almost all of eastern Tibet, and have carved up and sub-fragmented Tibetans and the lands they live on into four Chinese provinces, ten autonomous prefectures and two autonomous counties. In this way they distort and confuse people as to what the true picture inside Tibet is.

For 70 years, generation after generation of Chinese leaders have tried to break the faith and loyalty of the fiercely independent Tibetan people to His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, to Buddhism, and to a distinct Tibetan identity that existed for well over a thousand years before the People’s Republic of China was even founded.

But after using countless strategies, resources, and unimaginable violence, Xi Jinping now believes the best way for China to conquer Tibet is to “kill the Tibetan in the child.” He is doing this by taking nearly all Tibetan children away from the people who will surely transmit identity to them—their parents and families and spiritual leaders and teachers—and handing them over to agents of the Chinese state to raise them to speak a new language, and practice a new culture and religion—that of the Chinese Communist Party.

A little over a year ago, Tibet Action Institute released a report showing that at least 800,000 Tibetan children are living in a massive network of primary, middle, and secondary boarding schools across all of historical Tibet. This shockingly high number means that at least three out of every four Tibetan children aged six to eighteen is now separated from their family and living in a state-run colonial boarding school where the medium of instruction and the entire curriculum is focused on fostering loyalty to China.

Tibetan is taught as a single language class, and Tibetan culture is most often reduced to nothing more than song and dance and the tokenized wearing of traditional Tibetan clothing. The practice of Tibetan Buddhism is strictly forbidden.

China doesn’t hide the fact that these schools exist. There is plenty of online propaganda claiming the students in boarding schools are happy and receiving a modern education. This propaganda nearly always features—very prominently—that single Tibetan language class. But what it hides, and what was not included in our report, is the existence of boarding preschools in rural areas.

And though we were hearing reports from Tibet that parents were being forced to send children as young as four and five years old away, we could not find any details on where they were being sent or what schooling they were receiving. It was only on the eve of releasing our report that we met an expert eyewitness who’d recently fled from Tibet and who confirmed the existence of mandatory boarding preschools for children in rural areas.

Dr. Gyal Lo, a Tibetan academic who holds a Ph.D from the University of Toronto and has over thirty years of experience in the field of education in China and Tibet, estimates that an additional 100,000 to 150,000 Tibetan children now live in boarding schools. He’s visited more than 50 such preschools where children are required to live from Monday to Friday, and where they are immersed in a completely Chinese learning environment, including participating in war reenactments dressed in PLA uniforms or Red Army suits.

One Tibetan teacher described the situation in her area like this: “Usually there are very few Tibetan teachers; the majority are Chinese. So teachers only speak in Mandarin and conduct all school curriculum in Mandarin, including nursery rhymes and bedtime stories. When [the children] join primary school . . . hardly any of them can speak Tibetan.”

Dr. Gyal Lo witnessed the impact of these preschools in his own family when, after just three months, children who’d grown up in an entirely Tibetan speaking household preferred to speak in Chinese. He also saw them growing emotionally distant from their parents and grandparents and acting like guests or strangers in their own home.

Try to imagine your children or loved ones at this age and the heartbreak this is causing for these families. I have a six-year-old, and three-year-old twins, and so I am fully immersed in this period of childhood development right now. Kids at this

stage need the care of their parents and family to help them eat, bathe, and get dressed and—perhaps more importantly—to scare away the monsters at night, to comfort them when they are hurt or sick, and to reassure them that everything is going to be okay.

Tibetan parents don't want to send their kids away. And most wouldn't if they had a choice.

Some parents refuse, and many more want to, but China's repression makes the price of resistance extremely high. Those who do face financial penalties and the loss of essential government support systems such as health care, education, and the national identity cards required for every activity. In order to avoid sending their kids away, some families split up—sending one parent to live with the child in an urban area where they can attend a day school. Other parents sleep in cars near the boarding preschools in order to be close to their children at all times. And, of course, the children are suffering too.

Research by scholars in China and Tibet, as well as reports by other outside sources, clearly shows that the removal of children from their homes, as well as the highly regimented and isolated boarding school life, is psychologically traumatizing Tibetan children. And firsthand accounts of Tibetans who attended boarding schools in Tibet show that pervasive racism and discrimination will inevitably lead them to develop feelings of shame and ethnic inferiority.

These impacts of the colonial boarding school system in Tibet sound hauntingly similar to those of the residential boarding school systems used to eliminate Indigenous identities in Canada, the U.S. and Australia. This is because Xi Jinping and Chinese leaders are pursuing the same strategy, for the same reasons, in Tibet, in East Turkistan and Southern Mongolia. They are trying to quell resistance and consolidate China's rule over foreign lands and peoples.

And while Chinese officials argue the schools in Tibet are “fundamentally different from boarding schools of the colonial era”—in part because the students get to attend schools with modern facilities—they miss the point entirely that what matters most is what Tibetans want for their children. Even if the schools are gleaming new and the children wear Tibetan chubas, have one Tibetan class a day and are occasionally fed Tibetan food, Tibetan parents don't want their children to have their identity and mother tongue stripped away from them and replaced with that of a Chinese nationalist.

Dr. Gyal Lo likes to simplify this issue by saying: “It is not about how good the school facilities are, but what is happening inside. The fundamental question is: who is teaching what to whom?”

In Tibet, the answer is clear: The Chinese state is removing Tibetan children from their homes by force or coercion and placing them in schools where they have to speak Chinese and conform to Chinese culture and tradition while stripping them of their own identity, including their religion and their mother tongue.

If this is not colonial education, I don't know what is.

And when viewed together with the all-out attack on Tibetan Buddhism and the nomadic way of life, we can see that Xi Jinping and the Chinese Communist Party intend to destroy everything that makes Tibetans Tibetan. Calling it “Ethnic Unity” or “Ethnic Fusion” or assimilation or sinicization doesn't make it different, or any less colonial, than what was done by the governments of Canada, the U.S., and Australia to the First Nations, Indigenous and Aboriginal peoples.

And what it is is crystal clear to Tibetans. Just as it is clear to Uyghurs, and to Southern Mongolians. China is committing genocide in Tibet. And at a time when our nations are finally reckoning with these atrocities, that Xi Jinping is pursuing a strategy targeting children for the elimination of language and culture—a colonial strategy that is now reviled and condemned around the world—should be, along with the Uyghur genocide, a massive red flag for the international community of the true nature and intention of the Chinese Communist Party.

But this doesn't have to be the end of the story. Tibetans inside Tibet have not stopped fighting. We hear about their acts of resistance every single day. And our Uyghur, Southern Mongolian, Hong Kong, and Chinese activist brothers and sisters are fighting too. Now is the critical time for the world to step up and help.

To that end, Tibet Action Institute respectfully urges:

- All members of Congress and senior Administration officials to publicly condemn China's colonial boarding school system in Tibet and call on the government of China to immediately halt the implementation of this system, and especially boarding preschools;
- The members of this Commission, together with other members of Congress, to request that the Administration lead democracies in exposing and publicly op-

posing the colonial boarding school system in Tibet at the U.N. Human Rights Council and in other multilateral fora;

- The Administration to sanction Chinese leaders and officials responsible for the colonial boarding school system, and especially the intellectual architects responsible for developing and implementing this system;
- Congress and the Administration to secure programmatic support for Tibetan organizations working to preserve and advance Tibetan language and culture, especially the establishment of Tibetan language programs and schools for Tibetans living in the United States;
- The members of this Commission to create a task force based on the understanding that China's campaign of ethnic elimination in Tibet, East Turkistan, and Southern Mongolia, as well as its repression in Hong Kong and threats against Taiwan, are interlinked and part of the same problem of Chinese colonialism, and therefore require a unified framework to generate policy responses adequate to compel current and future generations of Chinese leaders to change course. Recognizing that this problem constitutes a crisis requiring an international response, this task force would explore and recommend to the Administration all available diplomatic, economic, and political responses, including the option of forming an International Contact Group; and
- The members of this Commission to press China to allow the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Special Procedures, and other independent human rights experts immediate, meaningful, and unfettered access to Tibet, including access to colonial boarding schools, and especially boarding preschools.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF TENZIN DORJEE

CHINA'S TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION AGAINST TIBETANS IN THE DIASPORA

Thank you Chair Smith, Co-chair Merkley, and distinguished members of the Commission. It is an honor to testify today on China's transnational repression against Tibetans in the diaspora.

Oppression produces exile. All oppressed nations have a blessing called diaspora, where stateless exiles are able to enjoy freedom of expression, religion, assembly, and association that they are denied back home. Once upon a time, Tibetans in the diaspora enjoyed these freedoms too.

But in the last decade, many of these freedoms have succumbed to the long arm of the Chinese government. From Nepal and India to Sweden and Switzerland, and now in Canada and the United States, formal and informal agents of the Chinese government are using some of the oldest tactics of manipulation and some of the newest technologies of repression to bully, threaten, harass, and intimidate Tibetans into silence.

To fully grasp why and how China's apparatus of transnational repression targets Tibetans, we must understand its origins. China has historically viewed the Tibetan diaspora as a leading threat to its global reputation. In the nineties, the international Tibet movement was quite successful at exposing China's human rights violations and generating bad PR for the regime. This was undermining Beijing's foreign policy objectives.

It was during this period that the Chinese government launched a new campaign to clean up its global image. But instead of improving its human rights record at home, Beijing decided to go after the Tibet movement abroad.

China proceeded to develop a sophisticated set of tools, tactics, and strategies to silence not only Tibetans but all pro-Tibet voices. This multi-year project to dislodge Tibet from the global agenda and erase it from public consciousness targets students, activists, artists, academics, former political prisoners, and elite institutions. Some of my friends and colleagues in Canada and the United States have gone through traumatizing experiences as a result of being targeted either directly by Beijing or by online mobs of Chinese nationalists, who are often acting at the behest of the Chinese consulates.

One strategy that Beijing employs with devastating effectiveness is the relationship mapping that links individuals in the diaspora to their families in Tibet. This mapping of family connections allows Chinese authorities to use the fate of relatives back home as a pawn to blackmail exiled Tibetans into silence.

Two years ago, I interviewed a Tibetan American in New York who had visited Tibet to see her aging parents. She told me how toward the end of her trip, her minders from the United Front explicitly told her that her political behavior going

forward would determine not only her future chances of getting a visa, but also the safety and well-being of her family members in Tibet.

Her parents are basically the hostage, and her silence in exile is the ransom—a ransom she must pay every day by refraining from actions, online or offline, that may be perceived as critical of China. Agents of the United Front or the Chinese consulate unfailingly communicate this message to every Tibetan American who visits Tibet or applies for a visa.

Most of the time, though, Tibetan Americans are denied a visa simply because of their racial identity. Tibetan Americans applying for a China visa are generally put through a tortuous process of ethnic discrimination, individual humiliation, and eventual rejection—but not before their data is harvested by the consulate. They are made to provide the names, locations, occupations, and other biographical details of their relatives in Tibet. Each piece of information surrendered to the consulate is a data point that Beijing uses to map the Tibetan diaspora.

This transnational family mapping is designed to manufacture a sense of guilt in the conscience of the exile, making her feel that her political participation will endanger her family in Tibet. The ultimate goal of this “coercion by proxy” is the political deactivation of the exile.

Another common Chinese strategy is the weaponization of funding to depoliticize institutions and demobilize communities. This mechanism is visible in the case of Baimadajie, the self-identified Tibetan NYPD officer who was spying for the Chinese government. Exploiting the power of his NYPD uniform, he was trying to manipulate the leaders of the New York Tibetan community.

He was saying to them: “You guys are paying a monthly mortgage of nearly 50,000 dollars for your community center. I have some very wealthy Chinese friends who can help subsidize your mortgage. But you should stop flying the Tibetan flag at your events, and you should ban any discussion of political issues at this venue.”

By dangling the promise of funding before the community leaders, Baimadajie was trying to depoliticize and co-opt one of the most important Tibetan-owned spaces in the diaspora.

Beyond targeting Tibetan communities, Beijing has used its control over access and funding to shape political discourse on university campuses, cultural institutions, academic forums, and even influence the research agenda of budding scholars and aspiring Sinologists. Beijing’s apologists happily exploit the openness of our democratic systems to defend the world’s largest dictatorship.

Nevertheless, I believe there are ways to fight this. The U.S., and the West in general, has conceded so much ground to China in the last three decades and moved the equilibrium so far in Beijing’s favor. It is time to reset the diplomatic baseline and go back to first principles of historical truth and legal rights. It is time to liberate ourselves from the delusion that sweeping human rights under the rug and throwing Tibetans and Uyghurs to the wolves would somehow make China more likely to cooperate on issues of common interest and geopolitical importance.

The best way to counter China’s transnational repression is to proactively support the Tibetan, Uyghur, and Hong Kong people’s transnational, decolonial advocacy for human rights and self-determination, and strengthen the Chinese people’s long-standing struggle for democracy and freedom.

### **Recommendations**

1. I request that Congress and the Administration set up a hotline—if possible, even an office dedicated to this issue—where people can report incidents of transnational repression by Beijing, and make relevant information and resources available in Tibetan, Uyghur, and other languages so that affected communities will find it easy to report incidents, seek protection, and pursue justice. These measures would not only help protect vulnerable communities but also deter CCP agents from engaging in some of their more blatant forms of harassment and intimidation.

2. I request that Congress look into the role and responsibility of universities in the United States to protect the freedom of students who are targeted or at risk of being targeted by Beijing’s apparatus of transnational repression. So far, public as well as private universities have done a drastically inadequate job of protecting their Chinese, Uyghur, Hong Kong, or Tibetan students from harassment, intimidation, or espionage activities instigated by the Chinese consulates or other PRC agencies.

3. I request that Congress start mentally and discursively linking the issues of Tibet, Hong Kong, and Xinjiang as part of an overarching colonial problem that has persisted into the 21st century. The CCP lacks the legitimacy—historical or democratic—to rule these peoples and we should not let that foundational fact get lost in the complex discussions of the regime’s current crimes against humanity. If Congress can lead with bold language to describe the colonial relationship that is at the

root of China's genocidal policies and crimes against humanity in Tibet, Xinjiang, and Hong Kong and consistently deny Beijing the legitimacy to rule these peoples, others including the Administration will follow suit when the Overton window for emancipation widens.

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PREPARED STATEMENT OF REPRESENTATIVE SMITH

Good morning, and welcome to the first hearing of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China to be held during this 118th Congress.

Today's hearing is an extremely important one, one which I hope will get wide attention and circulation, for it deals with the attempt of the Chinese Communist Party to erase an entire people, the people of Tibet.

Cultural erasure happens when a people's language and religious and cultural heritage are stripped from them, when children are taken from their parents and placed in institutions—what we call “colonial boarding schools”—where they cannot speak their language or practice their religion, but instead are taught in an alien tongue and effectively indoctrinated, while the ties that bind them to their families and culture are washed away.

Roughly 80 percent of all Tibetan children within the Tibet Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China are housed in such institutions.

And that's not all. According to the 2022 State Department Human Rights Report, the CCP's abuses in Tibet include effectively placing Tibetan Buddhism under central government control and subjecting Tibetan women to “coerced abortion or forced sterilization.”

What is also shocking is how intrusive the CCP's totalitarian reach is. Biometric data—DNA and iris scans—of over a million Tibetans has been harvested and stored by the CCP. Blood samples were drawn even from children in kindergarten.

And you know what is even more shocking? The role of an American company, Thermo Fisher Scientific, in this genetic data collection and genetic surveillance program. In December of last year, Senator Merkley and I, along with Ranking Members Rubio and McGovern, wrote a letter to Mark Casper, the President and CEO of Thermo Fisher Scientific—and it is important that we note his name, MARK CASPER, as there needs to be accountability by corporate actors—asking him why DNA kits and DNA sequencer replacement parts were still being sold directly by his company to police in the Tibet Autonomous Region for use and abuse in collecting biometric data.

We know this and more importantly, he knows this—because there have been multiple reports by Toronto-based Citizen Lab, Human Rights Watch, and indeed this very Commission, of Thermo Fisher products being implicated in ongoing human rights abuses throughout the People's Republic of China, through the use of DNA obtained from Tibetans, Uyghurs, and other ethnic and religious minorities.

Indeed, the most nefarious misuse of DNA collection has been to find matches for organ recipients from unwilling, healthy, innocent victims.

While we have yet to see reports of this being done to Tibetans in Tibet, there is now a mountain of evidence that this is what is being done in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region against Uyghurs and other Central Asians such as Kazakhs and Kyrgyz.

Indeed, we know from Chinese open source reporting that the “Dead Donor Rule,” which governs transplants deemed ethical by the medical transplant industry, is routinely being violated in the PRC. We also know that 28 years of age is deemed the ideal age for organ ripeness by transplant surgeons in China, and there is effectively a culling of Uyghurs, Falun Gong practitioners, and others to illicitly and barbarically obtain their organs.

I would be remiss if I were not to note, however, that just yesterday evening, Congress took a major step forward in combating this horrific practice when the House of Representatives passed by a vote of 413–2 a bill I authored, along with lead Democratic cosponsor Bill Keating of Massachusetts, H.R. 1154, the Stop Forced Organ Harvesting Act of 2023.

We should also note that the long arm of CCP repression against Tibetans reaches into this very country, where Tibetans, along with Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities, not to mention Han Chinese dissidents living abroad, are targeted for harassment and pressure.

Finally, I want to note that Tibet is important because what has happened in Tibet, beginning in the 1950s, is a template for so many of the crimes against humanity that we see play out within the conventionally recognized borders of the People's Republic of China today and that prick our consciences, including what is happening in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

Indeed, both Tibet and Xinjiang are autonomous only in name, for both suffer a repression so staggering that one might consider it as amounting to genocide.

For genocide is not only what we associate with the Holocaust, the gas chambers and the mass killings of men, women and children. No. For according to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, acts of genocide, intended to destroy “in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group,” also include “causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; and imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; [and] forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”

That is what is happening in Tibet, just as it is in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. These crimes, I believe, are crimes that can amount to genocide.

But to end on a more positive note, we hope to hear today from a distinguished panel of experts who not only will help document these abuses, but also point us toward a way forward—to the preservation of Tibet, its language, its culture, its religion, and its people.

Thank you. And with that, I now yield to my esteemed colleague and Co-chair of this Commission, Senator Merkley.

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#### PREPARED STATEMENT OF SENATOR MERKLEY

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 U.N. 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; 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.

## PREPARED STATEMENT OF REPRESENTATIVE MCGOVERN

Good morning. I join Chair Smith and Co-Chair Merkley in welcoming those attending today's Congressional-Executive Commission on China hearing on Tibet, whose people are dear to my heart. As someone who has long advocated for the human rights of all Tibetans, I regret that I am unable to attend in person due to a scheduling conflict.

The grave, well-documented violations of the human rights of Tibetans that are the subject of this hearing have been going on for a long time. They are insidious because the long-term goal is to undermine the very existence of the Tibetan people.

On paper, the constitution and laws of the People's Republic of China (PRC) affirm the rights of ethnic minorities to "use and develop" their languages. But in practice, Chinese authorities are taking every opportunity to promote Mandarin at the expense of Tibetan (and other minority languages) in educational settings.

If Mandarin is essentially the only available language of instruction, any formal right to safeguard a mother tongue is moot. If criticizing the PRC's language policies is criminalized and language rights advocates are imprisoned, then clearly the right to "use and develop" minority languages is not respected.

If thousands of children, including children of preschool age, are coerced into attending boarding schools where the instructional language is mostly Mandarin, while also being prevented from studying Tibetan language, history, and culture in other settings, then Tibetans' supposed right to "use and develop" their language does not exist, regardless of what Chinese authorities say.

Those same authorities constantly interfere with the practice of Tibetan Buddhism. The policy of "sinicization" of religion—shaping religious identity and practice to adhere to ideological and cultural standards set by the PRC—is at work when Chinese officials claim legal authority to control the Dalai Lama's reincarnation. Or when they continue to hide the real Panchen Lama from the world. Or when they demolish historic Buddhist institutes and forcibly evict entire monastic communities, as happened at Larung Gar and Yachen Gar in 2016.

There are credible reports that PRC authorities are implementing pervasive surveillance programs in Tibetan areas of China—programs that involve the collection of DNA and the scanning of irises on a massive level. Some of the "data collection" efforts have been focused on temples, monasteries, and schools, including primary schools—the very institutions at the heart of Tibetan communities that are essential for preserving and renewing Tibetan culture.

Today's witnesses will provide the painful details of these PRC policies and their devastating consequences. Taken together, these policies are designed to leave Tibetans no choice but to assimilate into the majority Han Chinese culture and eventually disappear. This is cultural erasure. Tibetans in China cannot change these policies because they lack any effective say in how they are governed.

What can we do about this?

My answer to that question is H.R. 533, the Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Conflict Act that I introduced in January with House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Michael McCaul.

This bipartisan bill provides that it is U.S. policy to recognize that the Tibetan people have the right to self-determination under international law. But that right is precluded by current PRC policies—including all the policies that will be discussed today that aim to undermine the pillars of Tibetan existence—their language, religion and culture.

By reminding the world of the basic truth that Tibetans have a legal right to self-determination as a people, the bill strengthens the longstanding bipartisan U.S. policy of promoting dialogue between representatives of the Tibetan people and the PRC. The goal of dialogue, suspended since 2010, is to ensure genuine, meaningful autonomy for the Tibetan people. Achieving that goal would necessarily end the unjust and destructive PRC policies that we are examining today. Genuine autonomy would end cultural erasure.

The Tibetan people are resilient, and they have been patient. But no one should expect that they will be patient forever. The U.S. must state loudly and clearly that the Tibetan people have a right to their language, their culture, and to determine how they are governed—they have a right to self-determination and that right must be at the center of United States policy.



**United States House of Representatives  
Congressional-Executive Commission on China**

**“Truth in Testimony” Disclosure Form**

*In accordance with Rule XI, clause 2(g) of the Rules of the House of Representatives, witnesses are asked to disclose the following information. Please complete this form and attach it to your written testimony and it may be made publicly available in electronic format.*

1. Date of Hearing:
  
2. Hearing Title:
  
3. Your Name:
  
4. Organization, organizations, or government entity you are representing:
  
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Knowingly providing material false information to this commission, or knowingly concealing material information from this commission, is a crime (18 U.S.C. 1001). This form may be made part of the hearing record.

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**Witness Signature**

**Date**

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*Witness Biographies***Penpa Tsering, Sikyong, Central Tibetan Administration**

Sikyong Penpa Tsering was sworn in as the Sikyong of the Central Tibetan Administration and the Tibetan people at an official ceremony graced by His Holiness the Dalai Lama on May 27, 2021.

Born on June 3, 1963, Sikyong Penpa Tsering grew up in Lugsam Samdupling Tibetan Settlement in Bylakuppe in South India. After completing his higher secondary education from Central Tibetan School, Sikyong pursued his Bachelor's degree in Economics from Madras Christian College (MCC) in Chennai from 1985 to 1988.

While pursuing his college studies, a series of major demonstrations erupted in Lhasa, the capital city of Tibet, against the unjust policies of the Chinese government. During this critical period, Sikyong Penpa Tsering joined Tibetan Freedom Movement to initiate a solidarity campaign with the sufferings of the Tibetan people inside Tibet. This office also helped connect Tibetans living in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

Over the years after completing his college education, Sikyong Penpa Tsering served in various capacities and offered his wholehearted service to the Tibetan cause and people through nongovernmental organizations and by actively participating in various Tibetan political activities.

In 1996, Sikyong Penpa Tsering was elected as a Member of the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile from Domey Constituency. As a member of the Tibetan Parliament, he served as a representative of the entire Tibetan people and worked earnestly to resolve the issue of Tibet based on the mutually beneficial Middle Way Approach advocated by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Employing his knowledge of economics, Sikyong Penpa Tsering also served on the Parliament's Budget Estimate Committee many times.

In 2001, he was re-elected as a Member of the Tibetan Parliament during which he took on the role of the Executive Director of Tibetan Parliamentary and Policy Research Center (TPPRC), a research agency based in New Delhi. His efforts as the Executive Director of TPPRC and his constant outreach efforts directed towards Indian political leaders led to the successful revival of the All Party Indian Parliamentary Forum for Tibet (APIPFT).

In 2008, after his re-election to a third term as a member of the Tibetan Parliament, Sikyong Penpa Tsering was elected as the honorable Speaker of the 14th Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile. In 2011, he was elected to a fourth term as a member of the 15th Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile and was duly elected as the Speaker through a majority vote.

In his two decades of service as a Tibetan parliamentarian, Sikyong Penpa Tsering oversaw various initiatives and activities to enhance the Tibetan freedom movement. From fostering a grassroots foundation of democratic principles among the Tibetan people to empowerment of Tibetan youth through workshops and seminars, he worked diligently as a representative of the Tibetan people with an earnest effort to strengthen the Tibetan movement's diplomatic relations and advocacy on both the national and international stage.

From August 2016 to November 2017, Sikyong Penpa Tsering assumed the role and responsibility of Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama at the Office of Tibet based in Washington, D.C. His concentrated efforts to strengthen support for Tibet in the U.S. Government endeared many to the Tibetan cause. During his stint as the Representative, he also oversaw and participated in several forums and discussions on the issue of Tibet that included overseas Chinese intellectuals and democracy activists based in North America.

**Richard Gere, Chairman of the Board of Directors, International Campaign for Tibet**

Humanitarian, actor, and Golden Globe winner Richard Gere is known for his roles in such films as *Chicago*, *Days of Heaven*, *An Officer and a Gentleman*, *The Cotton Club*, *American Gigolo*, *Pretty Woman*, *Primal Fear*, *Arbitrage*, *Time Out of Mind*, and *Norman*.

For more than thirty years Gere has also worked to draw attention and practical resolutions to humanitarian crises rooted in injustice, inequality, and intolerance. He has served as a long-time rights advocate whose humanitarian efforts have taken him to Tibet, India, Mongolia, Nepal, Bhutan, Kosovo, Central America, and the Middle East.

Gere has used his popularity to amplify the voice of the nonviolent struggle for Tibet. He was co-founder and Chairman of Tibet House U.S. in 1987. In 1991, he founded the Gere Foundation, a private foundation focused on advocacy, education, human rights, and cultural preservation.

Mr. Gere joined the International Campaign for Tibet's Board of Directors where he has served as Chairman since 1995 and he has addressed the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, the U.S. House of Representatives, the European Parliament, and the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva. He has sponsored numerous U.S. visits, teachings, and publications by His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Since the early 1980s, Gere also campaigned for awareness and education in HIV/AIDS affected communities. He helped build the first female dormitory in India for HIV-positive women, their children, and HIV-positive orphans. He launched the Heroes Project in partnership with Parmesh Godrej, Kaiser Family Foundation and the Avahan AIDS Initiative of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to mobilize government, societal leaders, and the media industry to fight HIV/AIDS in India.

Most recently Gere has worked with advocacy groups like CRISIS UK and RAIS Fundación to draw attention to the homeless crisis. He has testified in the Spanish Senate on the value of housing first and the urgent need for integrated solutions around the issue.

Gere has received honors from Amnesty International, amfAR, the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation, Hadassah International, The Tibet Fund, and the Harvard AIDS Institute. He is the recipient of the German Sustainability Award for Advocacy, CARE's Humanitarian Award for Global Change, the Eleanor Roosevelt Humanitarian Award, the Marian Anderson Award, and Freedom House's Raising Awareness Award.

**Lhadon Tethong, Co-founder and Director of Tibet Action Institute**

As director of Tibet Action Institute, Lhadon Tethong leads a team of technologists and rights advocates developing open-source technologies, strategies, and training programs for Tibetans and others living under extreme repression. Formerly the executive director of Students for a Free Tibet International, Lhadon led the campaign against the 2008 Beijing Olympics. She received the James Lawson Award for Nonviolent Achievement from the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict in 2011 and accepted the Democracy Award from the National Endowment for Democracy on behalf of Tibet Action Institute in 2018.

**Tenzin Dorjee, Senior Researcher and Strategist at Tibet Action Institute**

Tenzin Dorjee is a doctoral candidate at Columbia University's Department of Political Science. He is the author of *The Tibetan Nonviolent Struggle: A Strategic and Historical Analysis*. His writings have appeared in the *Washington Post*, *Foreign Policy*, *Journal of Democracy*, *National Interest*, *Tibetan Review*, and the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Politics and Religion*.

