

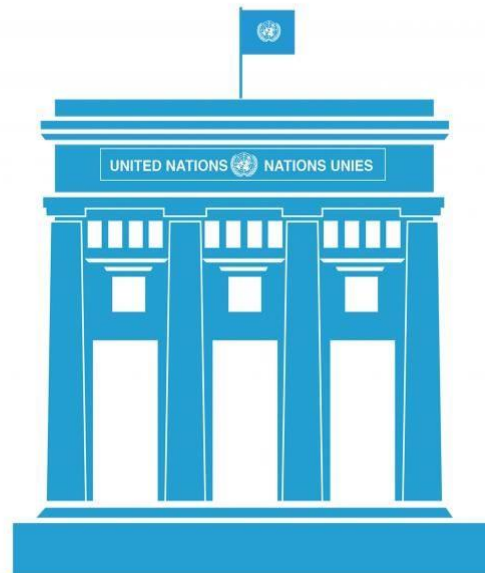


**THE TIBET BUREAU, GENEVA**  
**OFFICE OF THE REPRESENTATIVE OF H. H. THE DALAI LAMA**

**INFORMATION BOOKLET & BACKGROUND READING  
MATERIALS**

**GENEVA  
FORUM  
2020**

**9 -13 November**



**CHINA'S POLICY ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION: GLOBAL IMPACT**



PLACE DE LA NAVIGATION 10, 1201 GENEVA, SWITZERLAND  
Tel. +41 22 738 79 40 | Fax +41 22 738 79 41 | [info@tibetoffice.ch](mailto:info@tibetoffice.ch) | [www.tibetoffice.ch](http://www.tibetoffice.ch)

## **Table of Contents**

<b>Message of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Geneva Forum 2019</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Virtual Geneva Forum Week- Schedule</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Background Materials</b>	
<b>Theme 1</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Theme 2</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Theme 3</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Theme 4</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Biographies</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Concept Note- Third Geneva Forum, 2020</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Contact Details</b>	<b>54</b>

## Message of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Geneva Forum 2019



THE DALAI LAMA

### MESSAGE

I send my greetings to participants in this Geneva Forum on Human Rights in the People's Republic of China.

I have always maintained that China is an important country with which the rest of the world needs to engage. However, such engagement should always take into account the fundamental values that guide humanity. This means that the international community should not hesitate in pointing out unjustifiable actions on the part of the Chinese Government, whether in denial of basic rights to the citizens of the People's Republic of China or in actions across the globe. I hope this conference can help train a spotlight on the severe restrictions that religious communities are facing in the People's Republic of China.

Over the years, China has been changing and I hope it will follow the global trend towards transparency and freedom. The international community should support China in becoming a nation — with rule of law, respect for freedom and commitment to human rights. Such an outcome will be good for China's own future.

If China wishes to assume its rightful place in the community of nations, it will also have to shoulder the responsibilities that come with that position and uphold both basic freedoms and fundamental human rights.

31 October 2019

## Virtual Geneva Forum Week- Schedule Third Geneva Forum 2020

[9 November 2020 to 13 November 2020 | General Timings: 7 to 8:30 pm (India time), 2:30 to 4:00 pm (Geneva time) and 8:30 to 10:00 am (New York time)]

\*\*\*

### 9 Nov. 2020: Inaugural Panel

*Welcome Note:* Chhimey Rigzen, Representative, Tibet Bureau Geneva

*Guests:*

- Dr. Lobsang Sangay, President, Central Tibetan Administration
- Shri Ripun Bora, Member of Parliament, India
- Roberto Rampi, Member of Senate, Italy
- František Kopřiva, Member of Parliament, Czech Republic
- Regula Rytz, Member of Parliament, Switzerland
- Michael Brand, Member of Parliament and Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid, Germany
- Alfred Riedl, *President, Austrian Association of Municipalities, Austria.*

### 10 Nov. 2020: Panel 1: China's Policy on Freedom of Religion under the Global Framework

*Moderator:* Tashi Phuntsok, Representative, Office of Tibet- Brussels

*Speakers:*

- Mikulas Peksa, Member of European Parliament, Czech Republic
- Nury Turkel, Commissioner, US Commission on International Religious Freedom
- Laurence Fehlmann Rielle, Member of National Council, Switzerland
- Dr. Tsering Topgyal, Assistant Professor in International Relations, University of Birmingham

### 11 Nov. 2020 : Panel 2: Religious Persecution: Crackdown on People of Faith in China

*Moderator:* Sonam Frasi, Representative, Office of Tibet- London

*Speakers:*

- Dr. Tenzin Tsultrim, Visiting Research Fellow, Tibet Policy Institute
- Nijat Turghun, Researcher, Stockholm University
- Father Bernardo Cervellera, Director, AsiaNews
- May Bhaktiar, Falun Gong Practitioner and Human Rights Activist

**12 Nov. 2020: Panel 3: Tibetan Buddhist System of Reincarnation and Why China wants to control it?**

*Moderator:* Karma Choeying, Secretary, Department of Information and International Relations

- Geshe Lhakdor, Director, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives
- Telo Rinpoche, Representative, Office of Tibet-Moscow
- Piero Verni, Author and Founding President, Heritage of Tibet
- Tsewang Gyalpo Arya, Representative, Office of Tibet-Tokyo

**13 Nov. 2020: Panel 4: Countering China's Persecution of Believers: Way Forward**

*Moderator:* Thinlay Chukki, Special Appointee for Human Rights, Tibet Bureau Geneva

- Sophie Richardson, China Director, Human Rights Watch
- Jakup Klepal, Director Forum 2000
- Benedict Rogers, Founder/Executive Director, Christian Solidarity Worldwide
- Tenzin Palmo, Researcher, International Campaign for Tibet-Germany

**Followed by: Geneva Forum 2020 Declaration**

- Read-Out by Kai Muller, Executive Director, International Campaign for Tibet-Germany

**Followed by: Closing Note**

- President Dr. Lobsang Sangay, Central Tibetan Administration
- NR Nicolas Walder, Swiss Parliamentarian and Co-President of Swiss Parliamentary Group for Tibet

## Theme 1

### China's Policy on Right to Religious Freedom and the Global Framework

The tradition of protecting religious freedom has marked the histories of people world over. In the recent global history right after the First World War, these traditions fell under a discourse on human rights and achieved a formal recognition as the right to freedom of religion.<sup>1</sup> By the time the 1945 United Nations (UN) Charter was drafted, this particular right had grown into an inalienable part of our international norms. The Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 -- hailed as the foundational international instrument on religious freedom -- in particular pronounced the progress in the path of a religiously free and harmonious international community. It informed that “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change [one’s] religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.” The concern for religious freedom appears early, evident from its coding into a foundational instrument like the 1945 UN Charter Article 55. The UN policies on the freedom of religion and belief have thereafter seen many more declarations and conventions.

However, this progress has not been smooth and swift. These international milestones are still a far cry from the realities of ongoing religious intolerance that marks national and local bodies. In this milieu, it does not help the international community that one of its biggest and most influential players like China sabotages such an important freedom.

With its opening up to the world in the 1970s, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) soon joined the international bodies and became signatories to respective legal treaties, conventions and declarations. Since the signing of the UDHR and the UN Charter by PRC in 1971, its role as a Security Council member with veto powers in the United Nations enlarged its international role but has vehemently curbed transparency and accountability. In fact, it has heavily guarded against external actors right from the beginning.

Over 1.2 million Tibetans were killed under Chinese rule and since 2009 a total of 154 Tibetans were forced to self-immolate in Tibet due to lack of civic space to protest through other means. One key aspect about these acts of protests is that “most of the self-immolators have [*sic*] called

---

<sup>1</sup> Dickson, B. (1995). “The United Nations and Freedom of Religion.” *International Comparative Law Quarterly*, 44 (2): p. 330.

for the return of the Dalai Lama and freedom for the Tibetan people.”<sup>2</sup> The PRC’s crackdown against the practice of Buddhism with impunity in Tibet especially forcing the Tibetans to denounce their religious and spiritual leader form the foundational blocks of China’s “freedom of religion with Chinese characteristics.” It has time and again violated international laws undermining the international human rights system.

What is different about China’s approach is that it does not perceive the nature of law as normative unlike the West. The PRC has instead sought to view law in a “functionalist” sense, such that “there are signs that the PRC is perceiving law primarily as a means to achieve concrete benefits. These benefits include economic and reputational gains as well as positive governing effects of depoliticization stemming from legalizing contentious issues...When legal certainty is beneficial for China, it is improved. In other cases, China prefers vague legal norms that are open to interpretation not constraining the exercise of political power.” This sort of approach in the context of core international laws by focusing on the loophole has allowed China to stay legal on paper whilst simultaneously undermining the “spirit” behind the legal instrument.<sup>3</sup>

### **China on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB)**

Within China, the Chinese constitution has protections for the freedom of religion and belief. Implementation of these protections are however reliant on the Communist Party of China (commonly known as CCP- Chinese Communist Party) which is officially an atheist body. Its atheism has to be understood as carrying forward the Maoist legacy that sees religion as a potential threat to the State. As such, the party has failed to uphold these constitutional provisions by maintaining a tight and arbitrary grip over religious observances. Evidence is mounting about potential adverse human rights impacts on religious groups in China, including Tibetan Buddhists, Protestants, Catholics, Muslims and Falun Gong practitioners.

The provisions for protecting religious practice in China are restricted to 5 state-sanctioned major religions -- Taoism, Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, and Buddhism. The ‘sanctioning’ of such religious groups is motivated by the idea of dragging religion *below* the party-state. Such notions are echoed time and again: in his 2017 report at the 19th National Congress of

---

<sup>2</sup> ---. (2013). “What Makes Tibetans Self-Immolate?” *VOA News*. <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia/what-makes-tibetans-self-immolate>.

<sup>3</sup> Rühlig, Tim. (2018). “How China approaches international law: Implications for Europe.” *EU-Asia at a Glance*. [http://www.eias.org/wpcontent/uploads/2016/03/EU Asia at a Glance Ruhlig 2018 China International Law.pdf](http://www.eias.org/wpcontent/uploads/2016/03/EU%20Asia%20at%20a%20Glance%20Ruhlig%202018%20China%20International%20Law.pdf).

the Chinese Communist Party, President Xi Jinping stated that, “we will fully implement the Party's basic policy on religious affairs, uphold the principle that religions in China must be Chinese in orientation and provide active guidance to religions so that they can adapt themselves to socialist society.”<sup>4</sup> It was during this same Congress that President Xi introduced the Xi Jinping Thought into the CCP constitution to carve out Socialism with Chinese characteristics.<sup>5</sup> Such *sinicization* has moved the CCP into intervening in the appointment of religious heads directly, underscored by the Vatican’s recent decision to recognize the legitimacy of bishops appointed by the Chinese party-government.

Tight party control over religion under his administration is understandably at the heart of Xi Jinping Thought. Right at the inception, the constitution around religion has been designed such that while it allows for Freedom of Religion or Belief in China, it is only insofar as they contain themselves to ‘normal religious activities.’ Notwithstanding the use of vague legal phrasing like ‘normal’, the law goes on to prohibit “making use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens, or interfere with the educational system of the State” as well as seeing that “[r]eligious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination.”<sup>6</sup> In their 2017 Congressional Executive Commission on China Report the US also noted this vagueness saying, “[w]ith essential terms such as ‘normal’ undefined, it is unclear whether China’s Constitution protects the same range of belief and outward manifestation that is recognized under international law.”<sup>7</sup> Such steps have allowed the party-state to keep even these state sanctioned religions bound to the CCP’s grip. Ironically, CCP uses the seven religious associations to maintain absolute control over these five sanctioned religion groups in compliance with the party-state as opposed to ensuring that they are able to practice religion freely.<sup>8</sup> Within the CCP’s own party body, atheism is required of its members. In 2011, the director of the Committee for Ethnic and Religious Affairs of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Zhu Weiqun had stated that “Those who believe in religion shall not join the Chinese Communist Party.” This remains the policy even to this day and the CCP has even called for its party officials to denounce religion

---

<sup>4</sup> “Full text of Xi Jinping's report at 19th CPC National Congress.” *China Daily*.

[http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/19thcpcnationalcongress/2017-11/04/content\\_34115212.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/19thcpcnationalcongress/2017-11/04/content_34115212.htm).

<sup>5</sup> “19th CPC National Congress.” *Xinhua*. <http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/19cpcnc/index.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> (2018). “China: Religion and Chinese Law.” The Law Library of Congress, Global Legal Research Center. <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1068681/download>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> “Repressed, Removed, Re-Educated: The stranglehold on religious life in China.” *CSW: Everyone Free to Believe*. <https://www.csw.org.uk/2020-china-report>.



in writing, with those who show religious leanings potentially facing a risk of disciplinary infraction. Some provinces like Zhejiang have moved towards discriminating against applicants who have religious beliefs when recruiting for CCP members.<sup>9</sup> Effects of such policies can be felt on the larger society with people believing in religion reporting large scale discrimination while looking for jobs, business opportunities, work and even travels such as when booking Airbnb rooms.<sup>10</sup>

The extent of the party atheism however appears to follow its members even after they retire from the government capacities and leave the CCP. In the so-called Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), with the implementation of a ban on religious observances by government members in the aftermath of a tightened policy on religion in “TAR” in 1994, “it was never made explicit that the ban also applied to retirees and not just serving officials. Officials in work unit meetings orally transmitted the ban and it is not known to have been written down. A similar ban on religious activities has applied to schoolchildren and students in the “TAR” since around 1994.”<sup>11</sup> Such restraints on retired government officials even though they are not legally bound to abstain from religious activities, are nothing but violation of religious freedom -- one of the core categories of human rights. Worse still, the cost of not following the order means losing one’s vital source of subsistence, i.e., retirement pensions including access to free medical care. However, the fact that these diktats are deliberately kept oral makes it easy to conceal the ground realities from written (often international) promises that the CCP makes about promoting Tibetans’ human rights.<sup>12</sup>

The regulations on religious freedom in China seem to tighten further. The 2004 Regulations on the Administration of Religious Affairs (RRA) revised in 2017 had “amended, added, and abridged several provisions on general principles, religious groups, religious schools, venues for religious activities, religious professionals, religious activities, religious assets, and legal responsibility (Regulations).”<sup>13</sup> Such detailed control communicated through vague terms have

---

<sup>9</sup> Lee, Karen Dr. (2013). “Religion still has no role to play in communist politics.” *South China Morning Post*. <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/1283412/religion-still-has-no-role-play-communist-politics>.

<sup>10</sup> (2019). “China (Includes Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, And Macau) 2019 International Religious Freedom Report.” *United States Department of State Office of International Religious Freedom*. <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/CHINA-INCLUDES-TIBET-XINJIANG-HONG-KONG-AND-MACAU-2019-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> “China: Ban on Tibet Religious Activity Toughened: Scrap Limits on Former Officials’ Freedom of Religion.” *Human Rights Watch*. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/09/11/china-ban-tibet-religious-activity-toughened>.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>13</sup> “Global Legal Monitor: China: Revised Regulations on Religious Affairs.” *Library of Congress*. <https://www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/china-revised-regulations-on-religious-affairs/>.

further lent the CCP with sheer power to hold any act or person or organization accountable at whim. For instance, it limits foreign ‘control’ over religious matters in Article 5 with the same vagueness around what they mean by ‘control.’ It also warns against any religious activity that may endanger national security under its Article 4.<sup>14</sup> These overbroad rules have been abused to restrict Uighur population in Xinjiang by citing threats emerging from “three evils” -- “ethnic separatism, religious extremism, and violent terrorism.”<sup>15</sup>

In September 2019, the Chinese government published a draft guideline to regulate online religious activities in order to maintain “religious harmony” and prohibit “illegal promotion of religion.” As per the draft guidelines, organizations, institutions and venues are required to obtain a license from provincial religious affairs departments before disseminating religious information online. The license is granted only if the applicant is established within the PRC and its representative is a Chinese citizen and a resident of mainland China. Overseas organizations or individuals are prohibited from engaging in any online religious information services in China.

Studies have argued that “the outdated religious policy has rendered itself ineffective in controlling religions, all the while antagonizing the Chinese populace and the world community. The religious policy has become one of the liabilities in China’s stride for modernization and for entering the global stage.”<sup>16</sup> The problem with constitutional protection of religious freedom in China is that it is reserved only for the 5 religious-groups, and by virtue of that, criminalizes the rest. This is a clear marker of the CPC’s tight grip on freedom of religion or belief. This is a clear marker of the CCP’s tight grip on freedom of religion and belief. Practitioners of Falun Gong who are not state-sanctioned are branded as “heterodox teachings” (CHN: *xie jiao*) and face punishments such as torturous imprisonment under Article 300 of the CCP’s Constitution.<sup>17</sup> However on further enquiry, we notice that heavy restrictions are also placed on the state-sanctioned religions like Tibetan Buddhism.

To counter the rigid precedence of state over nationals in China, it is important to ensure that there is a shift in the CCP’s gaze: it has to allow freedoms to roll out so that people’s liberties become equally important to defining a state. For an authoritarian state like China, this will not

---

<sup>14</sup> “Repressed, Removed, Re-Educated: The stranglehold on religious life in China.” *CSW: Everyone Free to Believe*. <https://www.csw.org.uk/2020-china-report>.

<sup>15</sup> *Supra* 13

<sup>16</sup> Helle, Horst J. (2017). "Religious Vitality in Contemporary China." In *China: Promise or Threat?: A Comparison of Cultures*. Brill publications: pp. 56.

<sup>17</sup> *Supra* 14

only help ameliorate the lives of those who are facing religious persecution but simultaneously also solidify the very foundations of an international infrastructure like human rights beyond its borders.

### **The US on China's Freedom of Religion and Belief**

The US has acknowledged the need to voice against the religious suppression in Tibet, Xinjiang and other particular areas of concern. It since 1999 catalogued the PRC as “Country of Particular Concern” under its International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for its stock of undermining acts against religious freedoms.<sup>18</sup>

Most recently in 2020, the Congress passed the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act in order to allow access to American international media in a bid to promote free press. Doing so will usher the necessary transparency that the authoritarian architecture of China currently lacks surrounding several issues including the freedom of religion or belief.

In April 2018, the United States Senate also unanimously passed a resolution declaring that the “identification and installation of a future 15th Dalai Lama, is a matter that should be determined solely within the Tibetan Buddhist faith community.”<sup>19</sup> The resolution further states that any interference by the Chinese government is “invalid interference.” This year, the U.S. Congress is pending the approval of the Tibetan Policy and Support Act of 2019 at the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations which was previously passed at the House of Representatives with a bipartisan supermajority vote. This update will seek to intensify the U.S.’s concerns over religious freedom and environmental protection in Tibet. It also seeks to build on the protection coded in 2005 House Resolutions 337 against the PRC’s control over the reincarnation of His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the grounds that it interferes with “internationally recognized right to religious freedom...and to highlight the fact that other countries besides China have long Tibetan Buddhist traditions and that matter related to reincarnations in Tibetan Buddhism are of keen interest to Tibetan Buddhists populations worldwide.”<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> *Supra* 10

<sup>19</sup> Maheswari, Dhairya. (2018) “US irks China over Tibet even as India toes a cautious line.” *National Herald*. <https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/international/us-irks-china-over-tibet-even-as-india-toes-a-cautious-line>.

<sup>20</sup> “Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute to H.R. 4331 offered by Mr. Engel Of New York. Text of the bill retrieved from (2020). “House passes Tibetan Policy and Support Act!” *International Campaign for Tibet*. <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA00/20191218/110338/BILLS-116-HR4331-E000179-Amdt-95.pdf>

### **The EU's outlook on FoRB in China**

Drawing from international laws on FoRB namely the UDHR Article 18 and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Article 18, both in tandem with UN Human Rights Committee's General Comment number 22, the Foreign Affairs Council which met at Luxembourg in 2013 formulated 'EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief'. It sought to determine the EU's FoRB policy vis-à-vis third parties to explain what the international human rights standards on freedom of religion or belief are, and give clear political lines to officials of EU institutions and EU Member States, to be used in contacts with third countries and with international and civil society organisations. They also provide officials with practical guidance on how to seek to prevent violations of freedom of religion or belief, to analyse cases, and to react effectively to violations wherever they occur, in order to promote and protect freedom of religion or belief in the EU's external action."<sup>21</sup> The EU has seen growing seriousness around gaining religious literacy and building dialogue on FoRB as evident from its appointment of Special Envoy for FoRB in 2016.<sup>22</sup>

Under the said Guideline, the EU had stated the importance of challenging "attempts to make the exercise of human rights conditional upon state permission, for example by compulsory registration of religious or belief groups and/or the banning of unregistered religious activity."<sup>23</sup> Such a pointer is contested by the practices adopted by China of sanctioning religion and criminalizing others. Another point in the Guidelines, "to take action when requirements for religious or belief-related organisations to register are used as a means of state control rather than to facilitate the exercise of the freedom of religion or belief"<sup>24</sup> is also sabotaged by the ongoing control over religious groups by the CCP such as holding compulsory patriotic training for heads of the seven religious associations. Even the third point under the same Guideline that aims to encourage protection of religious heritage sites and worship places<sup>25</sup> is challenged by the CCP's measures to demolish monasteries, churches, including tight surveillance over housechurches, and mosques in China.

---

<sup>21</sup> Foreign Affairs Council meeting Luxembourg. (24 June 2013). EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief." *Council of the European Union*. [https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/137585.pdf](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/137585.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> Perchoc, Philippe. (2017). "Religion and the EU's external policies: Increasing engagement." *European Parliamentary Research Service*. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/divers/EPRS-IDA-614612-Religion-EU-external-policies-FINAL.PDF>.

<sup>23</sup> *Supra* 21

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*

Owing to these observations, the EU has voiced its discontentment as seen at the 2019 European Parliament. It has noted the deteriorating freedom of expression and religion under President Xi Jinping despite economic victories. Legal instruments like the February 2018 Regulations on Religious Affairs have increased control over religious freedom -- with China hosting one of the largest number of religious prisoners today -- putting the country at a “new low point since the start of the economic reforms and the opening up of China in the late 1970s.” The Parliament also recognized the need to press on its member states the importance of preventing the CCP from conducting its activities of control including espionage over religious and ethnic groups inside the EU. In order to ensure finally that the CCP led China comply with international standards around freedoms such as the FoRB, the European Parliament has called China to ratify the ICCPR, as well as allow “free, meaningful and unhindered access to Xinjiang province and Tibet Autonomous Region for journalists and international observers, including for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and UN Special Procedures”<sup>26</sup> as part of the political dialogue as stated in the 2013 EU Guideline.

The EU efforts on freedoms and human rights have however not attracted the same level of enthusiasm from Beijing. The 2019 European Parliament also expressed its disappointment in the inefficacy of the 37th round of the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue and the absence of Chinese officials from the continued dialogue expected on 2 April with civil society groups for the second time in a row.<sup>27</sup>

\*\*\*

### **QUESTIONS AND ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED**

1. What are the larger ramifications of China orienting its policy on freedom of religion or belief to muster control for political gains?
2. To what extent is China’s policy on freedom of religion or belief different and often poles apart from the policies of the EU and the US?
3. By shunning all possible international mediation from outside, is it possible to imagine China ensuring Freedom of Religion or Belief in the country on its own? If not, how should the EU, the US and other countries reformulate their policies to address critical issues of religious persecutions by China?

---

<sup>26</sup> (2019). “China, notably the situation of religious and ethnic minorities: European Parliament resolution of 18 April 2019 on China, notably the situation of religious and ethnic minorities (2019/2690(RSP)).” *European Parliament*. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2019-0422\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2019-0422_EN.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*

## Theme 2

### Religious Persecution: Crackdown on People of Faith under China

China is one of the worst violators of freedom of religion or belief. Even though the Chinese government recognizes five religious groups namely Buddhists, Muslims, Taoists, Catholics and Protestants under the umbrella of “Patriotic Religious Associations,” it continues to meddle with and control their religious beliefs and traditions. Even these religious groups that have government recognition are not free of oppressive mistreatments. Tibetan monks and nuns, Uighur Muslims, Christians and other believers are often persecuted and are subjected to torture, physical abuse, arrest, detention, imprisonment and harassment.

According to the Political Prisoner Database by the human rights NGO Dui Hua Foundation, the following number of religious prisoners were recorded at the end of the 2017: 308 Protestants, 277 Almighty God Church members, 107 Muslims, 30 Buddhists, 9 Catholics and 3156 Falun Gong practitioners. It is under the larger umbrella of *sinicizing* religious communities that we are witnessing these similar and mass crackdowns occurring. Additionally, China’s heavy investment in the latest high-tech surveillance systems is a product of the need to facilitate its oppression of religious practices to a whole new level *en masse*.

#### Crackdown on Tibetan Buddhists

In June 2016, the Chinese government left an indelible mark on Tibetans by ordering large scale demolitions of two well-known Buddhist institutes, Larung Gar and Yachen Gar, in Karze (CHN: Garzi) prefecture of eastern Tibet. Larung Gar was one of the largest Tibetan Buddhist institutes in the world until monastic dwellings were destroyed and monks, nuns and lay Buddhist students evicted, reducing the population from more than 100,00 to 5,000 residents. Similarly, the recent satellite images show that nearly half of Yachen Gar residential area has been demolished and nearly 7,000 monks, nuns and lay practitioners were evicted. Those evicted were then put into internment camps for “political re-education.” The situation in these camps were so dire that a Tibetan Buddhist nun was driven to commit suicide as an escape. Six UN Special Rapporteurs issued a joint statement to China condemning the mass expulsion from the two religious institutes. In a sharply worded statement, the rapporteurs expressed “grave concern [...] over the serious repression of the Buddhist Tibetans’ cultural and religious practices and learning in Larung Gar and Yachen Gar.”

New administrative measures have been introduced to allow China to control internal monastic affairs. The monastic management committees of the institutes, which formerly consisted of

monks and nuns were replaced by government-backed agencies like the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) also known as the Religious Affairs Bureau, and officially approved religious organizations like the Buddhist Association of China. With the absorption of SARA under the United Front Work Department in 2018, the CCP has now shifted the control of religion in China from the Council of State to the direct purview of the party's Central Committee. The new control measures cover a range of areas including admissions, management, finances, security and administrative matters.

Elderly retired Tibetans are not allowed to go on *kora* a religious circumambulation of holy shrines and the admissions of novices to monasteries and nunneries are highly curtailed. This year in June, the CCP demanded to take down even the Tibetan prayer flags and poles from which they are hung under its "behavioural reform" campaign in Tibet. China has also banned Tibetan children in the so-called "Tibetan Autonomous Region" from participating in religious activities during school break. An education official from Lhasa Middle School was quoted saying that students were required to sign an agreement to "not take part in any form of religious activity during the summer vacation." The restriction came just after Chinese authorities banned Tibetan children and their parents from observing the Buddhist holy month of Saga Dawa in May 2018. Schools were instructed to inform the Education Bureau of any absences in class during the holy month. Not only were the retired elderly Tibetan public servants banned from participating in any religious activities, they were also encouraged to spy and report on each other.

Tibetans are neither allowed to pray to His Holiness the Dalai Lama nor possess his pictures. Further, monks and nuns are subject to China's "patriotic education" campaign. The state-sponsored "patriotic education" classes contain study materials that slanders His Holiness the Dalai Lama, praises Chinese Communist Party, and require subjects to swear allegiance to the CCP-installed Panchen Lama as opposed to the one rightfully recognized by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The CCP while officially claiming to be an atheist party is insistent on interfering with the appointment of the reincarnations of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. For decades, Chinese authorities have attacked and denounced the current His Holiness the Dalai Lama as a "wolf in a monk's robes" and a "dangerous splittist." The disregard for him however does not stop, if not further reinforce, the need for China to encroach on the tradition of his succession. This evinces China's total disregard for the religious sentimentalities around His Holiness the Dalai Lama among Tibetans and believers, keeping its focus solely on mustering power by imposing itself on the reincarnation tradition. The CPC has since 2007 formulated a measure called Order no. 5 requiring other all reincarnate monks to register for government approval. It

is not surprising that the CPC will justify the appointment of its own choice of 15th Dalai Lama using the same instrument.

In May 2019, five UN independent experts from five UN Special Procedures Mandates wrote a joint letter of allegation to China objecting to the sentencing of nine Tibetans for celebrating the 80th birthday of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in 2015.<sup>28</sup> The nine Tibetans are: Monk Drugdra, also known as Dukda or Drukdra; Monk Lobsang, Khedrub; Monk Lobsang Gephel; Monk Lodro; Ms. Ta're Kyi; Ms. Bonkho Kyi, also known as Wonkho Kyi; Mr. Trotsik Tsultrim; Mr. Tsultrim, also known as Tsulte; and Mr. Akyakya.

This year, in their communication dated 2 June 2020, five UN independent mandate holders from the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights; the Special Rapporteur on minority issues; and the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief highlighted two important points: one, the continued enforced disappearance of the Panchen Lama Gedhun Choekyi Nyima and the other, “regulation of reincarnation of Tibetan living Buddhas against the religious traditions and practices of the Tibetan Buddhist minority.” Raising particular concern about the regulation of reincarnation of Tibetan living Buddhas, the UN experts have noted that this “interfere[s][sic] and possibly undermines, in a discriminatory way, the religious traditions and practices of the Tibetan Buddhist minority.” Quoting the concerns of the Tibetan Buddhists, the UN experts have noted that “furthermore, there is fear that the Chinese authority will identify and appoint the successor of the current (fourteenth) Dalai Lama against the Tibetan traditions and the wish of Tibetan Buddhist communities.” They also endorsed the “CRC’s (Committee on the Rights of the Child) recommendation to allow an independent monitor to visit him to confirm his whereabouts and the extent to which he is able to enjoy and exercise his rights.”

### **Crackdown on Uighurs Muslims**

Recent reports seem to confirm that China may have legalized the “re-education camps” in East Turkestan (CHN: Xinjiang) all while fiercely denying their existence. The Xinjiang Autonomous Region Administration has revised its legislation to allow local authorities to “carry out anti-extremist ideological education” at “vocational training centres.”

---

<sup>28</sup> ---. (2019). “Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, Special Procedures, Joint letter of Allegations, AL CHN 5/2019.” <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=24546>.



China is accused of detaining upwards of 1 million Uighurs in detention camps and re-education centres. These structures are aimed at “curing” Uighur Muslims of their religion and grooming them to become loyal to the CCP. Inside the camps, detainees are forced to learn Chinese language, sing patriotic songs, and memorize rules applicable to Uighurs and other Muslims in the region. These rules are as invasive and as pernicious as not allowing Uighurs to speak their own language in public.

In the guise of defending China against Islamic terrorism, the Chinese government has turned the western region of Xinjiang into one of the world’s most heavily policed areas with unprecedented sophistication. The same grid-system was mirrored in Xinjiang as it was in Tibet when Chen Quango was appointed as the Party Secretary from Tibet to Xinjiang in 2016. The increase in the police-related job advertisements from 9000 prior to 2016 and 32000 in 2016, to over 60000 in 2017 is telling of this police-state style of governance in the region.

The measures to curb Uighurs’ freedoms however extend beyond the state: it has even gone international through Chinese initiatives under the trope of curbing terrorism in the region. During Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2015 it sought to create a new commitment among the four participating countries from Central Asia and Russia to build a “better SCO family” in order to ensure “regional security, stability and prosperity.” However, these have come to be seen as targeted attempts to muster further support for China’s suppression of Uighurs.

The CCP also controls the Uighurs by keeping checks on their foreign connections, making it an outright offense even to maintain ties with people from “26 sensitive countries” which include Kazakhstan, Russia, Turkey, Malaysia and Indonesia. Those who have friends or families in the listed countries face interrogations and arbitrary detentions that can quickly escalate to imprisonments.

Human Rights Watch reported that “the human rights violations taking place in Xinjiang today are of a scope and scale not seen in China since the 1966-1976 Cultural Revolution.” Unfortunately, the international community has largely turned a blind eye to the Chinese government’s systematic persecution of Uighurs. The Uighur diaspora and associations have consistently been making international appeals to make pre-requisite the end of oppression towards Uighurs a prerequisite when forging bilateral and multilateral agreements with China. Once at the intersection of the ancient Silk Road routes, today, Xinjiang is in the heart of China’s expansionist Belt and Road initiative. It presents potential new and important economic routes to and from Central Asia, thus making the need to turn the Xinjiang population into loyal CPC cadets even more pressing for China. As a result, the neighbouring countries

and the international community at large cannot ignore the gross human rights violations against Uighurs in Xinjiang.

### **Crackdown on Christians<sup>29</sup>**

According to recent reports, there are approximately around 31 million Christians in China. These tentative numbers are however hard to confirm due to the fact that that Chinese people have genuine fears about publicly announcing their faith even though the Chinese Constitution “recognizes” Catholicism and Protestantism. Those above 18 years of age are allowed to register with the Christian groups which are affiliated to government-approved churches. The crackdown on Christians has forced the believers to join underground congregations, commonly called “house churches,” instead. Members however continue to fear detentions and imprisonments, or flee for their safety. In 2019, more than 100 members were mass arrested from one of the best-known underground churches called Early Rain. Those who escaped detentions are now in hiding. Its pastor, Wang Yi, and his wife, are charged with “inciting subversion” and could face the risk of imprisonment for up to 15 years. Police in plain clothes stand outside the premise to deter visitors to the church. That said, Early Rain is not an exception but a rule of Chinese crackdown. In September 2018, another big church -- Zion’s Church in Beijing -- had been demolished and its pastor billed to the tune of 1.2 million yuan. The government sanctioned churches are also not spared from the constant and arbitrary control which is evermore tightening. These “*sanxi* churches” were one of the firsts to face the forced removal of over 1000 crosses in Zhejiang province from 2014 to 2016 under party chief Xia Baolong -- now the current head of the State Council’s Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office (HKMAO).

The CCP’s new gained authority over the appointment of religious heads is underscored by the Vatican's recent decision to recognize the legitimacy of bishops appointed by the CCP. A controversial provisional agreement between the Catholic Church and the Chinese government emerged at a time when Chinese authorities are cracking down on underground Christian churches in the country. Critics have also raised concerns that the deal makes no mention of the clerics currently held in Chinese detention. The Beijing-Vatican deal also has larger ramifications because China is instrumentalising the Vatican-deal as has a legitimacy to appoint not only Catholic bishops but also Protestant priests, Muslim imams, Jewish rabbis,

---

<sup>29</sup> Kuo, Lily. 2019. “In China, they’re closing churches, jailing pastors -- and even rewriting scripture.” *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/13/china-christians-religious-persecution-translation-bible>.

Hindu priests and Buddhist heads. This agreement also adversely affects ‘house churches’ who now become more vulnerable to state’s clampdowns.

Christianity in China is being *sinicized* to handle its growing number of followers in order to mobilize support for the party-state. The sale of Bibles are controlled and are barred from being sold online. The translations of Bibles are state-controlled for a “correct understanding” of the text that will highlight similarities between socialism and Christianity. The promotion of Christianity with Chinese characteristics between 2018 and 2022 has been launched as a “thought reform.” In 2019, heads of 500 churches in the country signed a statement announcing how the Chinese authorities had forced the removal of crosses, compelled them to hang the Chinese flag, and sing patriotic songs. They also resented the restriction on minors from attending churches.

Domestically, the mass arrests such as the one seen with the members of Early Rain Covenant Church -- who carried the annual practice of commemorating victims of the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989 among other social issues -- show how these religious sites are also suppressed from becoming safe space to discuss political disenchantments. Any foreign connections with churches in China are deemed a security threat and curbed.

The wave of crackdown has also been put on Christmas. Restrictions vary from bans on observing Christmas holidays in government institutions and schools, restrictions on putting up Christmas-themed stalls, decorations and parties, and curtailing exchanges of wishes or making Christmas social media posts across cities and counties in China.

### **Crackdown on Falun Gong**

Falun Gong is a modern *qigong* discipline which involves meditation and energy exercises with a moral philosophy centred on the tenets of truthfulness, compassion and tolerance often known to have drawn from Buddhist tradition. It was first introduced by Li Hongzhi in 1992 and gained wide popularity amongst the masses.

In 1999 the CCP banned its practice and carried out nation-wide persecution of the Falun Gong practitioners. The authorities mobilized the state media apparatus, judiciary, police, army, the education system, families and the workplaces against the group. The campaign was driven by large-scale propaganda through television, newspaper, radio and the internet. There are reports of systematic torture, illegal imprisonment, forced labour, organ harvesting and abusive psychiatric measures with the apparent aim of forcing practitioners to recant their beliefs in Falun Gong. Foreign observers estimate that over a million of these Falun Gong practitioners

may be illegally detained in camps for “re-education through labour,” prisons, and other detention facilities for refusing to renounce their spiritual practice.

In 2006, allegations emerged that a large number of Falun Gong practitioners had been killed to support the supply for China’s infamous organ transplant industry. An initial investigation found that “the source of 41,500 transplants for the six year period 2000 to 2005 is unexplained,” and concluded that “there has been and continues today to be a large scale of organ seizures from unwilling Falun Gong practitioners.” In 2008, United Nations Special Rapporteurs reiterated their requests for “the Chinese government to fully explain the allegation of taking vital organs from Falun Gong practitioners and the source of organs for the sudden increase in organ transplants that has been going on in China since the year 2000.”

In 2020 the China Tribunal held that “the Tribunal’s members are certain - unanimously, and sure beyond reasonable doubt - that in China forced organ harvesting from prisoners of conscience has been practiced for a substantial period of time involving a very substantial number of victims.” The Tribunal further condemned China as “criminal state” and held that “any person or organisation that interacts in any substantial way with the PRC – the People’s Republic of China – including doctors and medical institutions; industry, and businesses, most specifically airlines, travel companies, financial services businesses, law firms, and pharmaceutical and insurance companies, together with individual tourists; educational establishments; arts establishments should recognise that, to the extent revealed in this document, they are interacting with a criminal state.”<sup>30</sup>

### **Using COVID-19 to shroud increased attacks on Faith in China**

With all these sinicization and crackdowns on people of faith in China and their respective institutions, it is not far-fetched to imagine the worsened state of religion in China, where the first case of COVID-19 was detected. It is the same strain of surveillance used to curb Tibetans who rise up against the human rights violations such as freedom of religion and faith, that we witnessed in how the CCP curbed whistle-blowers of COVID-19.

Moreover, the CCP has gone further than subdue resistances from people of faith. In Tibet, monasteries in the capital of Lhasa were strictly cut off from engaging in religious presiding, with traditional religious activities “suspended” during *Losar* (New Year) this year. On 8 February, 2020 the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau of Sershul (CHN: Shiqu) county, Kardze (CHN: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture released a circular wherein the

---

<sup>30</sup> The Independent Tribunal into Forced Organ Harvesting from Prisoners of Conscience in China, [https://chinatribunal.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/ChinaTribunal\\_JUDGMENT\\_1stMarch\\_2020.pdf](https://chinatribunal.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/ChinaTribunal_JUDGMENT_1stMarch_2020.pdf)

Chinese officials strictly warned Tibetan monks against allowing any lay Tibetans in the monasteries while restricting the monks from going outside their residents. The Sershul County authorities also banned Tibetan monks from performing any religious rituals and prayers during the upcoming *Losar*. Any failure to abide by the order meant that, the monasteries would face closure, warned the circular in Tibetan.<sup>31</sup> For those of Christian faith, the same ban on opening a place of worship meant a ban on observing Marian pilgrimages -- a month that is dedicated to remembering Mary. All this occurs amidst the ongoing long-term plans of removing crosses from churches, possibly followed by their demolitions.<sup>32</sup>

The need for special COVID-19 measures have allowed the CCP to repurpose them for keeping people away from places of worship. The lack of transparency such as checked flow of information from China to the outside world especially during the COVID-19 has left many cornered. All this while, however, there were no restrictions on visiting the Mao temples built to deify Mao. For instance, the Mao temples were allowed to have mass gatherings of visitors in the Mao Hall during the pandemic while bans were imposed over other religious places.<sup>33</sup> It only goes to reaffirm that the CCP atheism is selective and oppressive. Its ever-strengthening architecture to conduct mass and pernicious surveillance of faith-based communities proves that for the CCP Orwellian politics prevails before humanity.

\*\*\*

## QUESTIONS AND ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED

1. What are the similarities in Chinese Communist Party's mistreatments toward faith-based communities in the country -- Tibetan Buddhists, Uighur Muslims, Chinese Christians, and Falun Gong practitioners?
2. How can these endangered religious followers and believers coordinate among themselves to challenge the CCP's repression?
3. How can we ensure that China follows its own constitutional provisions to protect the five state-sanctioned religious communities in the country?

---

<sup>31</sup> (2020). "Religious repression and free speech undervalued in Tibet amid Coronavirus breakout." *Tibet.Net* <https://tibet.net/religious-repression-and-free-speech-undervalued-in-tibet-amid-coronavirus-breakout/>.

<sup>32</sup> Sainsbury, Micheal.(2020). "China uses Covid-19 to ratchet up religious oppression.Events in Tibet and Xinjiang were a precursor to a renewed campaign against Christianity." *UCA News*. <https://www.ucanews.com/news/china-uses-covid-19-to-ratchet-up-religious-oppression/87902#>.

<sup>33</sup> Gueng, Li. (2019). "Mao Zedong as the Antidote to Coronavirus." *Bitter Winter*. <https://bitterwinter.org/mao-zedong-as-the-antidote-to-coronavirus/>.

4. How does China's increasing use of "re-education camps" to deal with "separatists" disprove its narrative of seeking cultural assimilation? Are these camps not turning into tools of total subjugation of these populations instead?
5. In what ways are international actors and bodies reinforcing China's false sense of legitimacy to continue mistreating the religious communities in the country?
6. How should the international community mobilize its bilateral and multilateral relations with China to condemn the CCP's decades-long and ongoing religious persecutions?

## Theme 3

### **Tibetan Buddhist System of Reincarnation and Why China wants to control it?**

The tulkus -- emanate body -- are understood to be manifestations of Bodhisattvas; these tall figures are a repository of wisdom and compassion who choose to be born again and again out of compassion in order to serve humanity. Thus, these bodies become the site of religion and path to conduct one's own spirituality for the Tibetan Buddhist followers. In other words, the tulku form not only symbolizes but also embodies Tibetan Buddhism. With respect to the specific question of succession, it is crucial that tulkus are appointed in a "lineal" fashion, that is, they reincarnate their predecessor, get discovered as the ones, and then get reinstated in their rightful monastic seats left vacant by the predecessors.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, the importance of tulkus and the entailing system of reincarnations is a serious matter for Tibetans.

It is important to note that the significance of tulkus and their succession have characteristically gone beyond just religious rituals. Tulkus would also engage in other salient roles such as "counsellors, teachers, scholars, lineage holders, writers of authoritative texts, masters of ritual, artists, administrators of monasteries and complexes of monasteries, heads of sects and sub-sects, doctors, political advisors, performers of charitable works, government officials of various kinds, and so on."<sup>35</sup> This also shows the complex way in which Tibetan Buddhism -- spiritually and culturally -- was integrated within the Tibetan society, making the two inseparable.

The CCP on the other hand, branding itself as an atheist body on the surface, is anything but that. It has been deliberately destroying the Tibetan Buddhism by controlling the process of reincarnation over which it has no legitimate authority. Such interferences do not take into consideration the ancient tradition and the sentiments of those who are attached to the Tibetan Buddhist system of reincarnation. The ongoing attack on religion in communist China is far from new. The Maoist Thought on which the People's Republic of China is founded had deemed religion as an evil. The ban on religious activities during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) is a fresh memory among the CCP as well as the populations. Despite all, faith among Tibetan Buddhists failed to be destroyed and saw resurgence during the 1980s. The renewed attempt was made by the CCP to crush this freedom again through various impositions

---

<sup>34</sup> Ray, R.A. (1986). "Some Aspects of the Tulku Tradition in Tibet." *The Tibet Journal* Vol. 11 No. 4 Special Issue -- Tibetan Social Philosophy: pp. 37- 44.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 58

including a martial law in 1989.<sup>36</sup> The CCP has also actively tried to impose its version of history about Tibet in China that describes the monastic order as purely a serfdom. Under this caricature, the CCP brandishes the religious figures as corrupt, from whom the poor suffered and therefore needed to be liberated. This however misinterpreted the popular perception of the rich religio-cultural bonds between the Tibetans and monastic order.

Since tulkus embody Tibetan Buddhism, the tradition of witnessing tulkus' 'presence' is crucial for developing one's spiritual path further.<sup>37</sup> However, the severe restrictions placed by the CCP to prevent Tibetans from witnessing the presence of important figures like His Holiness the Dalai Lama -- everywhere from barring attendance to religious gatherings like Kalachakra in India and punishing those who have attended on return by seizing their passports, to bans on even placing his picture at home -- snatches away the freedom of Tibetans to practice Buddhism among Tibetans in a manner they deem necessary. As a result, the majority of Tibetans and their successive generations in Tibet have been robbed of their faith under the CCP regime in China.

### **Escalating Chinese intrusion in His Holiness the Dalai Lama's reincarnation**

The recent surge in CCP's claims over the reincarnation of His Holiness the Dalai Lama is part of its larger political attack on Tibetan Buddhism. The CPC has remained opposed despite His Holiness the Dalai Lama's verbal and written statements that explicitly vests the power to decide his reincarnation, or even the termination of institution of Dalai Lamas altogether upon Tibetans as they see fit. The CCP has remained opposed. The latter has instead resorted to an unfounded yet stiff position such as one made by Zhu Weiqun, then Chairman of Ethnic and Religious Affairs Committee, that "Only the central government can decide on keeping, or getting rid of, the Dalai Lama's lineage, and the 14th Dalai Lama does not have the final say."<sup>38</sup>

### **The Invalidity of the Golden Urn**

Any claim that CCP may lay on His Holiness the Dalai Lama's reincarnation is far from valid. The emphasis on the custom of using Golden Urn to pick reincarnates of important sect leaders like His Holiness the Dalai Lamas and the Panchen Lamas overlooks the centuries-old Tibetan Buddhist tradition and system of recognizing reincarnations.

---

<sup>36</sup> Tobgyal, Tsering.(2012). "The Securitisation of Tibetan Buddhism in Communist China." *Politics and Religion* No. 2 Vol. VI: pp. 222-233.

<sup>37</sup> *Supra.* 34, p. 59.

<sup>38</sup> ---. (2014). "China: Dalai Lama has no right to end reincarnation." *CGTN*.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PufSfeBD0n0>.



The history of the Golden Urn goes back to the times of Manchu when the priest-patron relationship was established between Mongol kingdom and Tibet in the 1790s. The Manchu request was for a custom including picking lots from a Golden Urn to decide on rightful reincarnation of high Lamas for enthronement. Such a procedure was used only once but even that was observed passively. Neither the current His Holiness the Dalai Lama nor were the 9th and the 13th predecessors were not selected using this ritual. Even where the Golden Urn was observed, such as during the 10th Dalai Lama, it remained passive and not the critical part of the religious tradition. In fact, during the current His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the priest-patron relationship was already over, meaning not even a cursory customary claim over the reincarnation through something like the Golden Urn held water.

### **CCP and its Perverse handling of Tibetan Buddhism**

The CCP regards Tibetan Buddhism as an inherent threat to its existence (i.e. potential source of separatism). Thus, it has cracked down on Tibetans for practicing their religion freely and whatever little is allowed is heavily regulated, to manoeuvre it for its own political ends when needed. Contrary to the claim about progress in Tibetans' human rights in so-called TAR, the recent restraints on retired government officials from practicing religion is nothing but a violation of religious freedom -- one of the core categories of human rights. Worse still, the cost of not following the order means losing one's vital source of subsistence, i.e., retirement pensions including access to free medical care. However, the fact that these diktats are deliberately kept oral makes it easy to conceal the ground realities from written (often international) promises of promoting Tibetans' human rights.<sup>39</sup>

The politicization of Tibetan Buddhism is most notably evident from the enforced disappearance of the 11th Panchen Lama by the CCP. Instead of allowing Gedhun Choekyi Nyima to succeed as the 11th Panchen Lama as per the traditional system of reincarnation, the CCP installed their own party person in the position. This was unequivocally a political move to interfere with Tibetan Buddhism and undermine the Tibetan population. What is so perverse about this action beyond the interruption of the Tibetan system of reincarnation is that Gedhun Choekyi Nyima was just a 6 years old boy when the CCP kidnapped him and his family in 1995. Even after 25 years their whereabouts is still unclear.

The installation of a CCP members' son, Gyaltzen Norbu, as the 11th Panchen Lama cannot be mistaken as CCP's reverence for the Panchen Lama institution. Just prior to Norbu's

---

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

installation, the CCP had in fact jailed the previous Panchen Lama for speaking against the Chinese rule for the famines in Tibet in the 1960s. He passed away under suspicious circumstances after 8 years of imprisonment in 1989.<sup>40</sup> By installing Norbu onto the revered seat of Panchen Lama, the CPC has been puppeteering to gain religious control while seemingly looking the part of according religious freedom in the country. He has been made the vice-president of Buddhist Association of China, and thus, an important party position as the member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). And it is this same body, the CPPCC, that has been key in overtly rejecting His Holiness the Dalai Lama from deciding his own reincarnation. Norbu's installation therefore is entirely about playing Chinese communist politics and nothing to do with safeguarding Tibetan Buddhism.

Simultaneously, Tibetans have managed to reject the China-appointed Panchen Lama. Instead, they recognize Gedhun Choekyi Nyima as the 11th Panchen Lama. This is because his appointment actually followed the Buddhist traditional reincarnation system. Despite the CCP restrictions, the traditional actors involved in the system of Panchen Lama's reincarnation deliberately communicated with the already exiled His Holiness the Dalai Lama to confirm Gedhun Choekyi Nyima as the correct reincarnation. For this, the CCP got all the monks involved imprisoned. Such dedication to see the Tibetan reincarnation system being followed in spite of crackdowns simply goes to prove how tightly Tibetans still hold onto their religious beliefs, regardless of how much the CCP tries to destroy it.

Such politicization of the Tibetan Buddhism and controlling it for its own advantage defeats the impartial and democratic tenets that guide the reincarnation process. As Bodhisattvas, the tulkus serve the society by helping to defuse conflicts in society by acting as "go-between...free from partisan considerations and under a commitment to assist all beings, that enables him to perform this role."<sup>41</sup> As a democratic process, the fact that the tulkus in Tibet would be selected based on clues left by the very predecessors' ensured that the seat of religious authority would only be rightfully occupied by select tulku regardless of what social strata he belonged to at birth. The effect of such selection according to His Holiness the Dalai Lama was, "The reincarnation of high lamas had democratic influence, because incarnate lamas often chose to

---

<sup>40</sup> ---. "Gedhun Choekyi Nyima -- Panchen Lama." *Free Tibet*. <https://www.freetibet.org/about/human-rights/case-studies/panchen-lama>.

<sup>41</sup> M. G Chitkara (1998), *Buddhism, Reincarnation, and Dalai Lamas of Tibet*, A.P.H. Pub. Corp, p. 26

be reborn in humble families as the Thirteenth Dalai Lama did, so that men from lowly surroundings, like myself, were found in the highest positions in the monastic world.”<sup>42</sup>

### **Order no. 5 as Sinicization of Tibetan Buddhism<sup>43</sup>**

In January 2007, China’s State Administration of Religious Affairs issued a new regulatory measure called “Order No. 5” on “management measures for the reincarnation of living Buddhas in Tibetan Buddhism.” As one of the CPC’s main legislative tools to control Tibetan Buddhism, it requires an official registration of all the tulkus for approval to practice. Article 2 of the regulation says that “reincarnating living Buddhas shall not be interfered with or be under the dominion of any foreign organization or individual” and shall be (Article 7) “recognized by the provincial or autonomous regional Buddhist Association or the China Buddhist Association in accordance with religious rituals and historically established systems.” The CCP also began running a database on its websites of the China Buddhist Association under the State Bureau of Religious Affairs and “China’s Tibet” from 2016 onwards to track these tulkus. The constant watch on their activities shows complete disregard for the religious traditions or beliefs of Tibetan Buddhism and testifies to the intent of CCP to undermine His Holiness the Dalai Lama.<sup>44</sup> This contradicts any argument that CCP offers about “standardizing governance on living Buddha reincarnation, protecting people’s religious freedom, maintaining the normal order of Tibetan Buddhism and the building of a harmonious society.”<sup>45</sup> It also indisputably places the party over the tulkus.<sup>46</sup>

Then, there are also deliberate efforts to indoctrinate the tulkus in China: In 2016, the CCP started a “training courses for newly reincarnated Living Buddhas” that would require the tulkus to undertake party activities like visiting the CCP memorial sites like Mao mausoleum.<sup>47</sup> Other events include state-sponsored exhibitions to usher national religious policies, such as the one held in June 2020 called the ‘Exhibition on Tibetan Buddhism’. This event saw personnel from the United Front Work, Propaganda Department, Ethnic and Religious Affairs Committee and other research institutes. According to the Deputy Director and researcher at the Institute of History at the China Tibetology Research Centre, Feng Zhi, the exhibition

---

<sup>42</sup> Kuzmin, Sergius L. (2017). “Management as a Tool of Destruction: Reincarnation of “Living Buddhas” in Modern Chinese Legislation.” *The Tibet Journal* Vol. 42, No. 1: p. 64.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* p. 65.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2, 39.

<sup>45</sup> China Daily, *Rule on Living Buddhas Aids Religious Freedom*, 12 December 2007.

[https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-12/27/content\\_6351750.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-12/27/content_6351750.htm)

<sup>46</sup> *Supra.* 42, p. 37.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* p. 43.

served a way to make Tibetan Buddhism reincarnation system “comprehensive, three-dimensional, and true way” before the people. Such exhibitions across Tibetan areas are held to propagate the national religious policy of the CCP such as Tibet Buddhist Living Buddha Reincarnation Management Measures noted above.<sup>48</sup> These acts of controlling the revered Tibetan religious figures and sponsoring their participation in patriotic public events is one of the many active ways of using religious actors for forwarding state agenda.

Interfering with reincarnation of Tibetan Buddhist tulkus by *sinicizing* its practice stands most notably as a sign of attacks on Tibetan Buddhism in China. However, there are other pernicious ways through which the CCP hollows the Tibetan Buddhist heritage such as the traditional Tibetan medicine, *Sowa Rigpa*. China has begun appropriating Tibetan medicine as “Chinese ancient wisdom” and its symbolic Buddhist figure like Yuthog into Confucius-like. All this to erase the medicine’s fundamental link to the Tibetan Buddhism. According to Dr. Martin Saxer, anthropologist from LMU München, who studied the Tibetan Medicine noted that “When images of Buddhism are used, they tend to be general allegorical figures of Tibetan culture (monks in red robes, the Potala, scriptures) rather than expressions of the deep concern for the Buddhist roots of Sowa Rigpa, which many of the professionals working in the industry share.”<sup>49</sup>

### **Deification of Mao Zedong as the CCP’s religion**

Not only is the CCP *sinicization* of the Tibetan Buddhism a contravention of the PRC’s constitutional provisions to protect Tibetan Buddhism, but also a display of how farce its own atheism is. Contrary to its criticism of traditional practices, the CCP has gone on to nurture the worship of political helmsmen like Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, and Zhu De for political ends. The Shaoshan county where Mao Zedong was born has built a temple to deify him. It observes worship rituals similar to Buddhism and Taoism like lighting butter lamps, incense sticks, offering paper money, and even wrapping him in yellow robe akin to a Buddha.<sup>50</sup> Unlike other religious temples in the country, the CCP allows minors to worship at Mao temples.<sup>51</sup> These temples, of which there are several across the country, have become sites for Red Tourism.

---

<sup>48</sup> Lhadon, Tenzin. (2020). “The Chinese State’s Religious Paranoia.” *Tibet Policy Institute*. <https://tibetpolicy.net/author/tenzin-lhadon/>.

<sup>49</sup> (2013). *Manufacturing Tibetan Medicine: The Creation of an Industry and the Moral Economy of Tibetanness*. Berghahn Books: pp. 186-7.

<sup>50</sup> ---. (2016). “Mao Zedong, a persecutor of religions, is now worshiped like a god.” *AsiaNews*.

<sup>51</sup> Lu, Xin. (2019). “Is Mao Zedong Becoming the Main Deity in China?” *Mercatornet*.

People making pilgrimages to these locations in turn help feed patriotism and allegiance to the CCP.

While careful to guard any religious connotations that the Mao temples may attract however deified they may be, the CCP has conversely read everything that concerns Tibetan Buddhism as an inherent threat (i.e. of separatism). It is only so ironic that a personality like Mao is being deified by communist China with the same religious intensity that he had deemed poisonous throughout his regime.

\*\*\*

### **QUESTIONS AND ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED**

1. Why is China's installation of "patriotism" by meddling with the Tibetan Buddhist system of reincarnation an inherent failure?
2. Is the CCP ever-increasing control over the reincarnation system a sign of ethnic harmony or the complete opposite?
3. What will be irretrievably lost if we allow the communist China to forcefully appoint the reincarnation of an important Tibetan Buddhist figure as well as an international peace icon such as His Holiness the Dalai Lama?
4. Should the Tibetan Buddhist reincarnation system be trusted with the so-called atheist CCP?
5. How is the Chinese Communist Party's interruption affecting Tibetans and other followers of Tibetan Buddhism?
6. How can the international community ensure the protection of the religious traditions of Tibet such as the ancient reincarnation system?

## Theme 4

### Countering China's Persecution of Believers: Way Forward?

When China opened itself to the international community in the 1970s, it ushered a hope that the Chinese Communist Party would join the rest to fulfil the common values by fostering economic interdependence. This view was also bolstered with China coming forward to follow the international norms of humanity by signing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDR) in 1971. However, the hope still remains to be realized. Moreover, and rather pressingly, we fear that an Orwellian China is rearing its rivalled head and posing a threat to the existing international order of things. It has complicated the protections of human rights: one the one hand, it continues to discriminate its citizens through religious crackdown by evading transparency, but on the other hand, poses to show compliance with international norms such as by signing the UDHR.

One such area where the CCP-led Orwellian China has continued to act treacherously is the freedom of religion or belief. Since the creation of the People's Republic of China under Chairman Mao Zedong, religion has been deemed evil vis-à-vis the state. It is no surprise that this legacy runs deeply within the CCP as we know it today, currently headed by President Xi Jinping. The CCP brands itself atheist in profile. We have now however understood that this atheism is far from inert: the instrument that *sanctions* religions (5 in total) in China is the same one that *criminalizes* others like the practice of Falun Gong. Such interpretation of atheism that the CCP subscribes to -- selecting and excluding at whim -- is obviously just another tool to muster absolute control. It is far from being accommodating about the diverse faith-based communities, and rather more of squeezing the religious practices into its own mould.

The CCP has become despotic and is propagating its brutal regime via propaganda, surveillance, misinformation, denial of truth and manipulation of the past. China is forcing many countries to tiptoe to its diktats. China is only growing firmer with increasing networks of advocates inside and outside – especially forged through economic dependencies such as debt trap – to challenge the international order today. It thus undermines the core norms of human rights such as religious freedom during and after the fact of establishing itself as the dominant power.

The influence of China is growing in the international order as well. It is now one of the largest suppliers of United Nations peace keeping forces and also one of the largest contributors to be UN budgets. It recently won a seat to the UN Human Rights Council albeit with reduced

support as compared to the past. It has made concerted efforts to ensure that more Chinese nationals are employed in the UN and its various organs. It is trying to shift the fundamental definition of human rights from respect for human beings to economic and developmental related goals. It is further changing the international relations scenario from respect to human rights to respect for state sovereignty.

Within the country itself, the religious persecutions of Tibetans, Uighurs, Christians have been alike in erasing any loyalties that are not directed towards the CCP. Meanwhile, crosses on churches continue to be removed, monasteries fitted with surveillance agents and devices, and mosques facing demolitions. Other belief communities meanwhile suffer imprisonments and falling victims to organ harvesting operations. It is important to thus deeply reflect on how all these persecutions are being committed even with the existing set of checks and balances in our international system to ensure human rights and freedoms. Thus, it is in all our utmost interest that we keep a close look at where China is headed. As the saying goes, only dead fish float. It is thereby paramount that the CCP-led China with its ever-deepening ties with our governments, academic institutions (like Confucius Institutes), civil societies and homes, does not render us mute.

\*\*\*

## **QUESTIONS AND ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED**

1. How can we ensure that the international norms around human rights such as the freedom of religion or belief remain universal?
2. Is the international community in need of a *new* strategy to ensure the freedom of religion and belief in China? Or, can it rely on old ones by focusing on their proper enforcement instead?
3. In what ways and areas can we detect the Chinese Communist Party's challenging our common values of human rights and freedoms?
4. Is there a prospect for change within China by itself?
5. What are the people's voices on freedom within China and how can we amplify them?
6. In all this, what are the responsibilities of governments, private sector actors, civil society groups, academic bodies, and international organizations?
7. Is it secure in the long run for countries and regional unions to continue bilateral and multilateral relations without calling China to also comply with standard international norms such as the FoRB?

## Biographies

### Inaugural Panel Guests:

**Lobsang SANGAY**, *President, Central Tibetan Administration*



Dr. Lobsang Sangay is the first democratically-elected President of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) following the devolution of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's temporal role in 2011 and is currently on a second presidential term post his 2016 win. He has unveiled the Five-Fifty vision: Shaping Tibet's Political Future aimed at restoring freedom in Tibet and the return of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to Tibet in the 5-year term while simultaneously strategizing the Tibet movement for the next 50 years, if needed. He is the first Tibetan to earn a Doctor of Juridical

Science and has organized an unprecedented series of conferences between Chinese and Tibetan scholars, including a meeting between His Holiness the Dalai Lama and 35 Chinese scholars. He has received a citation award honouring the democratic institution of the CTA as envisioned by His Holiness the Dalai Lama by the National Endowment for Democracy, Takasu Award by the Takusu Foundation, the Gold Medal for Outstanding Contribution to Public Discourse from the Historical Society of Trinity College, Rataan Samman by Hansraj College and Bharatiya Chatra Sansad. He is a legal scholar with expertise in international Human Rights law, democratic constitutionalism, and conflict resolution. He has given lectures, published in academic journals like the *Journal of Democracy*, *East Asia and International Law*, and consulted for media outlets globally.

\*\*\*



**Ripun BORA**, *Member of Parliament, India*

Shri Ripun Bora is a member of parliament in the Rajya Sabha (Upper House), India and is a Member of several Parliamentary Committees including Committee of Privileges; Committee on Petroleum and Natural Gas; and Consultative Committee for the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways and Shipping. He is also the leader of the Indian National Congress party in Assam and is serving as the President of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee from 2016 till date. He is a former Cabinet Minister of

Government of Assam for Education and has also held several independent charges including Panchayat and Rural Development as well as Elementary Education. Prior to entering politics, he was a practicing advocate in Gauhati High Court, Assam Civil Service Officer and lecturer at Chaiduar College, Gohpur. He was even awarded President Award by the President of India for best performance in census work as a Assam Civil Service Officer in 1992. He has been closely associated with a number of NGOs working in the field of women empowerment; organized a number of cultural programmes in Assam; published a number of articles in newspapers and journals; debate, public speaking on current issues. He is a graduate of the Gauhati University with MA (Economics) and LL.B Degrees.

\*\*\*

**Roberto RAMPI**, *Member of Senate, Italy*

Mr. Robert Rampi is a member of the Italian Senate of the Republic. Before joining this office, he was an elected official in the Chamber of Deputies from 2013 to 2018 from the Democratic Party. He has also been a representative from The Group of Socialist, Democrats and Greens in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe since 2018. He is active across several committees in various capacities like the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media as a vice-chairperson, and as a full

member in the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media, and Sub-Committee on

Culture, Diversity and Heritage. He graduated with a degree in Theoretical Philosophy from the State University of Milan.

\*\*\*

**Regula RYTZ**, *Member of National Council, Switzerland*



Ms. Regula Rytz is a member of the National Council in Switzerland. She is a politician in the Green Party of Switzerland which she also headed in two separate occasions, first as the co-president from 2012 to 2016 and then the president from 2016 to 2020. Her professional stint spanning well over a decade in various capacities have seen her in the roles like the Councillor (executive) of the city of Bern / Director for civil engineering, traffic and urban greenery, Member of the Grand Council of the Canton of Bern, and engagement in numerous commissions with a focus on education, finance, economic and state policy among others. She is a historian by training and graduated from the University of Bern.

\*\*\*\*

**František KOPŘIVA**, *Member of Parliament, Czech Republic*



František Kopřiva is a Member of the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic. He represents the Czech Pirate Party. In the European Union, he vice-chairs the EU Affairs Committee. He is also a delegate to the The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe among the 324 parliamentarians from 47 Council of European nations who are speaking for the 830 million Europeans on human rights and democracy. His work on Tibet is most notably observed in the co-founding role of Czech Parliamentary Group for Tibet where he also serves as the co-chairperson. Mr. Kopřiva is a graduate of Charles University and Czech Technical University, both in Prague.

**Michael BRAND**, *Member of Bundestag, Germany*

Mr. Michael Brand is a long serving Member of the German Parliament and a profiled advocate on human rights. He has been elected speaker for human rights by the CDU/CSU parliamentary group, which is part of the ruling parties in Germany. He is also Chairman of the Tibet Parliament Group in the German Parliament, member of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and Co-Chair of the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China. Mr. Brand graduated with political science, law and history specialization at the Friedrich Wilhelms- University of Bonn, and later worked at the European Balkan Institute Bonn having studied abroad in Sarajevo during his university years. Mr. Brand has undertaken numerous journalistic engagements for national and international outlets. His latest book is "Human.Right." in which His Holiness the Dalai Lama is represented along with fellow Nobel Price Laureates and other human rights activists.

\*\*\*

**Alfred RIEDL**, *President, Austrian Association of Municipalities, Austria.*

Alfred Riedl is a mayor of his home town of Grafenwörth (Lower Austria) since 1990. In 2001 he was elected President of the Lower Austrian Association of Municipalities. In 2017 he was also elected President of the Austrian Association of Municipalities. In this function he represents the interests of 2,084 Austrian cities and municipalities. He began his career as a teacher and later as a tax advisor and founded his own tax consultancy in Tulln. The company now maintains offices in Tulln, Krems, Korneuburg and St. Pölten. He is a graduate of the Vienna University of Economics and Business.

**Welcome Address at the Inaugural Panel:**

**Chhimey RIGZEN**, *Representative, Tibet Bureau Geneva*



Mr. Chhimey Rigzen assumed office as the Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama for Central and Eastern Europe on 7th March, 2019. Prior to taking up this role, he was the Secretary of the Department of Home under the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) in Dharamshala, India. He had previously held the office of the Acting Secretary of Health Department and later, Department of Home between 2016 to 2017. He has also served as the Settlement Officer across various Tibetan exile settlements in India. Mr. Rigzin joined the CTA in January 1997 as the Deputy Secretary at the Kashag (Cabinet) Secretariat. He was born in Pemakoed, Tibet and completed his schooling in Darjeeling, India in exile.

## Panel 1: China's Policy on Right to Religious Freedom and the Global Framework

### Moderator:

**Tashi PHUNTSOK**, *Office of Tibet, Brussels*



Mr. Tashi Phuntsok is the Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama for the EU and Western Europe, based in Brussels. He took office in 2016. As a teacher, social advocate and diplomat, he has dedicated nearly 40 years of his life in the service of Tibetan community and served the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) in various capacities. During his first office as the Director of the Africa & Middle East Desk under the Department of Information and

International Relations, CTA, he played a pivotal role in arranging His Holiness the Dalai Lama's maiden visit to South Africa and his meeting with President Nelson Mandela in 1996. Later he established the Office of Tibet in Pretoria in 1997 and served there until 2001 as the Representative. Mr. Phuntshok's other notable diplomatic role includes the Representative for Office of Tibet in Brussels and Paris from 2001 to 2005. His other administrative roles were the Secretary in the Department of Information International Relations, Director of Tibetan Homes Foundation, Mussoorie, and Chief Representative of Southern Tibetan Settlements.

### Speakers:

**Mikuláš PEKSA**, *Member of the European Parliament*



Mr. Mikuláš Peksa started his political career in the Czech Pirate Party, where he was elected to the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech parliament. In 2019, he succeeded in the elections to the European Parliament, where he currently works with questions of research, industry, energy, budgetary control and economic affairs. Apart from his committee work, Mr Peksa has also been elected chair of the Tibet Interest Group in the European Parliament, and is the chairperson of the European Pirate

Party.

**Nury TURKEL**, *Commissioner, USCIRF*

**Mr. Nury A. TURKEL** is a Commissioner to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), as appointed by Speaker Nancy Pelosi in May 2020. He is the first U.S.-educated Uyghur American attorney and specializes in regulatory compliance, federal investigation and enforcement, anti-bribery, legislative advocacy, and immigration. He has also extensively worked as a human rights advocate, particularly for the Uyghurs. In 2003, Mr. Turkel co-founded the Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) which he currently chairs. He also served as the president of the Uyghur American Association that saw the release of a prominent Uyghur prisoner of conscience. Mr. Turkel has testified numerous times before the US Congress and advocated policy responses to the Uyghur genocide. Many of his recommendations have been incorporated into U.S. laws and pending bills relating to Uyghurs and China in Congress. Mr. Turkel has published widely in global newspapers and appeared in media like CNN, BBC, and Al Jazeera and spoken at numerous forums sharing his expertise on foreign affairs. In September 2020, Mr. Turkel was named one of the TIME 100 Most Influential People in the World.

\*\*\*

**Laurence Fehlmann RIELLE**, *Member of National Council, Switzerland*

Ms. Laurence Fehlmann Rielle is a member of the National Council of Switzerland. She is also the Director of FEGPA (la Fédération genevoise pour la prévention de l'alcoolisme) which works on prevention of alcohol and cannabis and is also co-responsible for the Carrefour addictions umbrella organisation. She was a member of the Geneva Grand Council from 1997 -2009, President of the Geneva Socialist Party from 2004 – 2008 and Municipal councillor in the City of Geneva (2011-2015 legislature), re-elected in 2015 and resigned due to the election to the National Council. She is the President of the Swiss-Burmese Association, Member of the ATE (Transport and Environment Association) and Member of Femmes Information. She has a Degree in Political Science, a Postgraduate Diploma in Public Administration (IDHEAP - Institut de Hautes Etudes en Administration Publique) and Master's

degree in advanced studies in public health (Faculty of Medicine) based in Geneva, Switzerland.

\*\*\*

**Tsering TOPGYAL**, *Assistant Professor, University of Birmingham*



Dr. Tsering Topgyal is an Assistant Professor in International Relations at the University of Birmingham. He is a political scientist with core research and teaching interests in Chinese politics and foreign policy and Asia-Pacific affairs with particular attention to security and ethno-nationalism in the region. His recent publications include *China and Tibet: The Perils of Insecurity* with Hurst Publishers and Oxford University Press in 2016. He has also contributed articles in peer-reviewed journals like *Pacific Affairs*, *Politics and Religion Journal*, *Journal of Contemporary China* and *China Report*. He completed his PhD at the London School of Economics in 2012. In 2012-2013, Dr. Topgyal was a Teaching Fellow in International Relations at Royal Holloway, University of London, where he taught Chinese foreign policy and International Relations. Currently, he directs the MA programmes in Diplomacy, International Relations, and International Security in the Department of Political Science and International Studies, University of Birmingham.

## Panel 2: Religious Persecution: Crackdown on People of Faith in China

### Moderator:

**Sonam Tsering FRASI**, *Representative of the Office of Tibet-London*



Mr. Sonam Tsering Frasi is the Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in London that oversees Tibet affairs in the UK, Ireland, Northern Europe, Poland and Baltic States. He is also a member of the Tibetan Task Force for negotiation on Sino-Tibetan dialogue. During his term as a member of the Tibetan Parliament in-Exile, he represented the Tibetans in Europe from 2001 to 2011, and pioneered the exchange programme of Tibetan Parliamentary delegations and their British counterpart between London and Dharamsala. His other early international engagements include the organisation of the International Lawyers Conference on Tibet in 1993 and the conference of Sino-Tibetan dialogue to find common grounds in 1997. Mr Sonam Tsering Frasi is a member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants, Institute of Directors, the Royal Institute of International Affairs- Chatham House, and the Royal Society of Astronomy. He was born in Rawang in Western Tibet.

### Speakers:

**Tenzin TSULTRIM**, *Visiting Research Fellow, Tibet Policy Institute*



Tenzin Tsultrim, PhD has earlier worked as a Research Fellow at the Tibet Policy Institute (TPI) a think-tank of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), Dharamshala, India. Currently he is working through the Tibet Corps (Dept of Finance), of CTA as a Visiting Research Fellow at the TPI. He earned his PhD in History on India-China Relations (1963-2010): A Study from the *University of Madras*, Chennai, India. He has published research papers and commentaries in different journals and online media outlets, including *Tibet Policy Journal*, *Strategic analysis Journal*, *Think India Quarterly Journal*, *World Focus Journal*, *the Diplomat*, *Hong Kong Free press*, *Asia Times*, *Modern Diplomacy*, *Bitter Winter magazine*, *the Quint* and *the Pioneer* (India National Newspaper).



He has also contributed a chapter titled ‘The Internal Situation in China and its impact on China’s foreign Policy: An Analysis’ in the book ‘*China’s Foreign Relations and Security Dimensions*’ (Routledge publisher, India) and a paper in the periodical, *Proceedings of the Institute of Oriental Studies*, Russian Academy of Sciences Vol. 1 on ‘Tibetology and Buddhism at the junction of science and religion’, edited by Tatyana Lvovna Shaumyan, and Sergey Lvovich Kuzmin.

\*\*\*

**Nijat TURGHUN**, *Political Analyst, Uyghur Research Institution*



Mr. Nijat Turghun is a Sweden-based Uyghur activist who has been actively involved in the cause of East Turkestan since 2007. He pursued his tertiary studies at the prestigious Stockholm University in the fields of international relations, political science and East Asia studies. Mr. Turghun has twice-served as the Chairman of the Uyghur Educational Association based in Sweden. He has been writing for the Uyghur Research Institution since 2018 and recently also became a member of the news outlet called Medium. Born

and grew up in Urumqi in East Turkestan, he came to Sweden in 2004.

\*\*\*

**Bernardo CERVELLERA**, *Missionary, PIFM and Director, AsiaNews*



Father Bernardo Cervellera is a missionary with the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions. He is also a journalist and currently heads the *AsiaNews* press agency after his editorial stint at the Vatican international press agency, *Fides* from 1997 to 2002. Fr. Cervellera has also lived in Beijing where he taught History of Western Civilisation at Peking University between 1995 and 1997. He is an avid contributor to various papers, magazines and other publications and collaborates with radio and TV news programmes. Some of his notable publications

include “Madre Teresa, la misericordia per l’Asia e per il mondo -- Mother Teresa, mercy for Asia and for the world” (2017), “Missione Cina – Viaggio nell’Impero tra mercato e

repression -- China Mission – Journey through the Empire between Market and Repression, in Italian” (2006) and “God is on Woman’s Side – Stories from the Land of the New Feminism, following the Beijing Conference” (1995).

\*\*\*

**May BAKHTIAR**, *Falun Gong Practitioner and Activist*

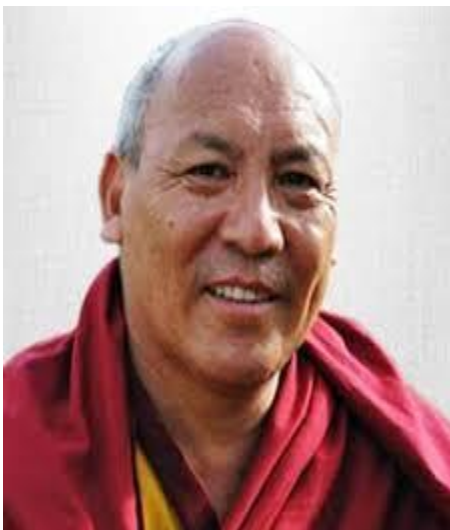


Ms. May Bakhtiar is a Falun Gong Practitioner and has been advocating for human Rights of Falun Gong since 1999. She has spoken at UN Human Rights Commission and UN Human Rights Council against the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners by the Chinese Communist Party. She has a Diploma in Economics from University of Geneva and Post Graduate Certificate from IUED (Institut Universitaire des Etudes de Développement ) that is now called The Graduate Institute. She was born

in Egypt and is a Swiss citizen now.

**Panel 3: Tibetan Buddhist System of Reincarnation and Why China wants to control it?****Moderator:****Karma CHOEYING**, *Secretary, Department of Information & International Relations, CTA*

Mr Karma CHOEYING is the Secretary of Department of Information and International Relations of the Central Tibetan Administration (DIIR, CTA). In his 24-year long illustrious administrative service with the CTA since 1996, Mr. Choeying had held many offices across India as the Additional Secretary at the Department of Home, the Administration section head at the DIIR, the General Secretary at the Bureau of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, New Delhi, the Tibetan Welfare Officer in Kalimpong and Darjeeling, the Secretary at the Tibetan Settlement Office, Dehradun, and Co-operative Secretary for Rabgay Ling Tibetan Co-operative Society, Hunsur. Overseas, he has served as the Secretary at the Office of Tibet in Brussels. Mr. Choeying was one of the handful Tibetan students who received the Tibetan Scholarship Program award in 2007 for a one-year study program at the University of San Francisco. He is a graduate of the University of Delhi, and completed his schooling from Tibetan Children's Village in Ladakh, where he was also born.

**Speakers:****Geshe LHAKDOR**, *Director, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives*

Venerable Geshe Lhakdor is the director of the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives based in Dharamshala, India. He has held roles in many bodies under the patronage of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Apart from his many representative and advisory roles, he has worked extensively within the field of education -- a founding member of the secular ethics in Education in 2015, His Holiness Dalai Lama nominated board member at the Central University of Tibetan Studies in Sarnath, India, professional member of the Council for Tibetan Education in Exile as well as a member of the Advisory Committee of the Tibetan Education in Exile, CTA. He has also published extensively and translated fundamental texts

to and from English and Tibetan. Geshe Lhakdor's rich academic prowess including a Doctor of Divinity from Drepung Loseling Monastic University, has earned him honorary professorships at the University of Delhi and the University of British Columbia in the past. India in 1995. Geshe Lhakdor was born in Yakra in the Western Tibet.

\*\*\*

**Telo Tulku Rinpoche**, *Head Lama of Kalmykia and Honorary Representative of H.H. the Dalai Lama to Russia, Mongolia and CIS countries*



Telo Tulku Rinpoche is the head lama (Shadjin Lama) of Kalmykia and Honorary Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to Russia, Mongolia and CIS countries. He received his early training in Buddhist philosophy at the Drepung Gomang in India. He was recognized as the reincarnation of Tilopa, a great Indian saint, there. His major efforts are aimed at spiritual restoration of one of the three Buddhist regions in post-Soviet Russia. As the President of the Buddhist Union of Kalmykia, he oversaw the revival of Buddhist structures in Russia.

Telo Rinpoche has been actively involved in forging intercultural and interfaith dialogues. He has worked to strengthen religious and cultural ties between traditional Buddhists in Russia and Mongolia with the Tibetan community led by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and organizing the latter's maiden visit to Russia. Telo Rinpoche has been engaging people in Buddhist philosophy through his talks and publications across Kalmykia, Moscow, Mongolia, India, United States and has been serving as the Honorary Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to Russia, Mongolia and CIS countries since 2015.

**Piero VERNI**, *Author and Founding President of Heritage of Tibet*

Mr. Piero Verni is a journalist, writer and video maker who lives between Brittany (France) and Italy. For more than thirty years, he has been concerned with Tibetan civilisation and Indo-Himalayan cultures. Among his books is an authorised biography of His Holiness the Dalai Lama (*Dalai Lama-biografia autorizzata*, Milano 1990; 2nd edition Milano 1998) and a study on Tibetan tulkus tradition (*Tulkus: the mystic incarnation of Tibet*, Venezia 2015). Among his documentaries, *Tibet My Country* (with Karma Choeky), Bruxelles 1996. He is currently working on the third updated edition of the biography of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and he is finishing editing a video about the tradition of Tibetan Tulkus. He is also one of the founding members of the “Associazione Italia-Tibet” of which he was president for the first 14 years and today is the president of the association “The Heritage of Tibet-L’Eredità del Tibet”

\*\*\*

**Tsewang Gyalpo ARYA**, *Representative, Office of Tibet Japan*

Dr. Tsewang Gyalpo Arya is the Representative at the Liaison Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama for Japan & East Asia. Prior to this, he served as the Secretary of the Department of Information and as the Director of Tibet Policy Institute, Dharamasala. Dr. Arya authored the *English-Japanese-Tibetan Conversation Hand book* and translated several Japanese folktales. He has authored and translated many Tibetan folktales and contributed many articles related to Tibet issue in various journals and media outlets. Dr. Arya received his doctorate in Buddhist Studies from the University of Delhi. He has two master's degrees, one in Japanese Studies from the University of Delhi, and the other in Economics from Annamalai University. He also has a Diploma in International Trade & Economics from Chiyoda College of Business, Tokyo.

## Panel 4: Countering China's Persecution of Believers: Way Forward

### Moderator:

**Thinlay CHUKKI**, *Special Appointee for Human Rights, Tibet Bureau Geneva*



Ms. Thinlay Chukki is the Special Appointee for Human Rights at The Tibet Bureau, Geneva. Previously, she worked as a researcher at the UN-EU and Human Rights Desk of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), Dharamshala, India. In the past, Ms. Chukki involved herself in the Tibetan community as Kannada language translator and later as pro-bono legal adviser. She has translated for His Holiness the Dalai Lama on several occasions. She has also been invited to speak at several conferences including at UN Side-Events and

C20 Conference 2020 and has also organized talks on Tibet including at Harvard Law School. Prior to the CTA, she headed the South-India Legal Department of TATA Motors in India. As a recipient of the Fulbright Scholarship also known as the Tibetan Scholarship Program, she pursued a Masters' Degree in Law (LL.M) from the Harvard Law School in 2018.

### Speakers:

**Sophie RICHARDSON**, *China Director at HRW*



Dr. Sophie Richardson is the China director at Human Rights Watch. A graduate of the University of Virginia, the Hopkins-Nanjing Program, and Oberlin College, Dr. Richardson is the author of numerous articles on domestic Chinese political reform, democratization, and human rights in Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Hong Kong, the Philippines, and Vietnam. She has testified before the European Parliament and the US Senate and House of Representatives. She has provided commentary to the BBC, CNN, the Far Eastern Economic Review,

Foreign Policy, National Public Radio, the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, and the Washington Post. Dr. Richardson recently authored *China, Cambodia, and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence* with the Columbia University Press (2009) to offer an in-depth

examination of China's foreign policy since 1954's Geneva Conference, including rare interviews with policy makers.

\*\*\*

**Jakub KLEPAL**, *Executive Director of Forum 2000 Foundation*



Mr. Jakub Klepal is the Executive Director of the Forum 2000 Foundation. He is a member of the Board of Directors of the Association for Democracy Assistance and Human Rights (DEMAS), which he also chaired in 2009-2010. Mr. Jakub is also the Founding Curator of the Prague Hub of Global Shapers of the World Economic Forum (WEF). Previously, he worked as an analyst with the Research Centre of the Association for International Affairs (AMO) as the Head of its Americas program, and served as a member of its Board of Directors. He also worked as a journalist, a research scholar at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) and as a Fulbright Scholar at the Monterey Institute of International Studies (MIIS) in the United States. He is a graduate of the Faculty of Social Sciences at Charles University as well as a graduate of the Joseph M. Katz Graduate School of Business at the University of Pittsburgh.

\*\*\*

**Benedict ROGERS**, *Founder of Hong Kong Watch*



Mr. Benedict Rogers is a UK-based human rights activist. He co-founded Hong Kong Watch two months after he was rejected entry into Hong Kong on Beijing's orders in 2017. He served as the Chair of Trustees of Hong Kong Watch until leading it as the Chief Executive in September this year. He is also the co-founder and Deputy Chair of the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission, a member of the advisory group of the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China (IPAC), a co-founder of the International Coalition to Stop Crimes Against Humanity in North Korea, an advisor to the World Uyghur Congress and the Stop Uyghur Genocide Campaign, Senior Analyst for East Asia at Christian Solidarity Worldwide, and a trustee of several other charities. Mr. Rogers has authored six books and is

a regular contributor to international media including the BBC, The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, The New York Post, The Diplomat, Foreign Policy and The Spectator. He has testified in hearings in the British Parliament, European Parliament, Japanese Parliament and United States Congress. He has an MA in China Studies from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London and a BA in History and Politics from Royal Holloway, University of London. He has lived in China, Hong Kong, East Timor and Washington, DC and is now based in London.

\*\*\*

**Palmo TENZIN**, *Advocacy Officer for ICT, Germany*



Ms. Palmo Tenzin is an Advocacy Officer for the International Campaign for Tibet in Germany. She is an experienced researcher and policy officer specialising in Chinese politics and contemporary Tibet. Prior to her advocacy work, Palmo held positions working in the Australian Government and the Australian Strategic Policy Institute. Palmo holds degrees in China studies, Security studies, and Economics from the Australian National University and the University of Oxford. Her interdisciplinary studies have allowed her to focus on a range of topics in the Tibetan region; her Honours thesis analysed Sino-Indian water security issues on the Yarlung Tsangpo/Brahmaputra River, while Master's thesis explored the rise of Tibetan social enterprises in eastern Tibet.



## Geneva Forum Declaration 2020 Drafting Committee

### Committee Members:

**Kai MÜLLER**, *Executive Director, International Campaign for Tibet- Germany*



Mr. Kai Müller has been the executive director of the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) in Germany since 2005. The association promotes the self-determination and human rights of Tibetans and maintains offices in Washington, Brussels, Berlin and Amsterdam. The organization is supported by around 15,000 people in Germany. Mr. Müller is a jurist and social scientist with specialization in Social Studies, Political Science, Public Administration by training, having graduated from

Humboldt University in Berlin.

\*\*\*

**Karma CHOEYING**, *Secretary, Department of Information and International Relations*

(Please refer to Bios under Panel 3)

\*\*\*\*

**Thinlay CHUKKI**, *Special Appointee for Human Rights, The Tibet Bureau Geneva*

(Please refer to bios under Panel 4)

## Closing Note

### Guests:

**Dr. Lobsang SANGAY**, *President of the Central Tibetan Administration*

(Please refer to bios under Inaugural Panel)

\*\*\*

**Nicolas WALDER**, *Member of National Council, Switzerland*



Mr. Nicolas Walder is a member of Swiss National Council (Conseil National) from Geneva. He is concurrently a Vice-President of the Les Verts Suisses, and previously served as the president of Les Verts Genevois from 2016 to 2020. His Parliamentary mandates include the membership in the EFTA/EU-Delegation, Delegation to the French-Speaking Parliamentary Assembly (FPA), Member of Legal Affairs Committee and Foreign Policy Commission. In

his rich political career, Mr. Walder has undertaken the roles of Administrative councilor (executive) for the City of Carouge from 2011 to 2020, President of ‘Les Verts Genevois’, President of the Fédération Genevoise des Etablissements médico-sociaux (Geneva Federation of Medico-social Establishments), Member of Committee at Pro Senectute- Geneva, Member of the board of the Intermunicipal Foundation of Bardonnex, Carouge and Troinex for housing for the elderly, and Member of the Sustainable Development Council of the Canton of Geneva. He graduated from University of Geneva and EHL in Switzerland.

## Concept Note- Third Geneva Forum, 2020

Virtual Geneva Forum Week 9 – 13 November, 2020

---

<b>Theme</b>	China's Policy on Freedom of Religion: Global Impact
<b>Participants</b>	Religious leaders, experts, scholars, researchers, human rights activists, civil societies, diplomats and the like.
<b>Date &amp; location</b>	9-13 November 2020, Virtual
<b>Organizer</b>	The Tibet Bureau, Place de Navigation 10, Geneva 1201
<b>Contact information</b>	Ph: +41 227387940   email: genevaforum@tibetoffice.ch

---

### Introduction:

The human rights situation in the People's Republic of China has been seeing a downward trend since its inception in 1949. In recent times, it has only gone worse. China is now playing an increasingly aggressive role in challenging universally accepted principles of human rights and the UN human rights protection and assessment mechanism. In order to preserve the international human rights system and to bring forth the ground realities in China to counter China's propaganda, a forum focusing on human rights in China has become more crucial than ever.

The first Geneva Forum was held on 2 November 2018 in the backdrop of China's third Universal Periodic Review at the UN Human Rights Council. It brought together a select group of human rights experts, practitioners, academicians, activists, diplomats, advocates and activists for a day-long forum to report and discuss the "human rights situation in regions under the People's Republic of China." It had representations from all the regions including Tibet, East Turkestan (CHN:Xinjiang), Southern Mongolia (CHN: Inner Mongolia) and Hong Kong and also the affected country like Taiwan.

Following its huge success and based on the overwhelming feedback, it was decided to hold the Geneva Forum as an annual event. The second edition of Geneva Forum was scaled up to a 2-day long forum to discuss "China's high-tech repression and freedom of religion." On 14-15 November 2019 human rights experts, researchers, practitioners, parliamentarians, diplomats, technology experts, civil society groups, activists and journalists convened for the Geneva Forum 2019. The highlight of the forum was a declaration titled, "Geneva Forum Declaration 2019" by all the speakers, experts, defenders, witnesses and participants calling

upon China, UN, governments and international community to take note and stop China from violating human rights.

The Geneva Forum on Human Rights has evolved to be a unique platform for human rights experts, practitioners, academicians, activists, governments, diplomats, think tanks, civil society groups and the affected groups to monitor and evaluate the human rights situation in regions under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) including Tibet, East Turkestan (CHN: Xinjiang), Southern Mongolia (CHN: Inner Mongolia) and Hong Kong. By bringing together a diverse group of individuals, organizations and institutions, the Forum aims to examine a coordinated multilateral approach to challenge and hold China accountable for its worsening human rights record.

Due to the Wuhan-originated COVID-19 pandemic and for ensuring the safety and well-being of all the speakers and participants, the third edition of the Geneva Forum will be held virtually. The two-day Geneva Forum for this edition will be converted into a **Virtual Geneva Forum Week** starting from 9 to 13 November 2020. The Geneva Forum will be inaugurated with an inaugural panel on 9 November. From 10 to 13 November, each day one panel discussion will be held with the final panel and a short closing note on 13 November 2020.

### **Central Theme for Third Geneva Forum**

The theme for the Third Geneva Forum 2020 is “China’s Policy on Freedom of Religion: Global Impact.” The forum will report and deliberate on the declining freedom of religion in regions under China leading to religious persecution. It will also touch upon the constant interferences by the Chinese government in the religious practices of believers including the selection of their religious leaders, case in point being the continuous Chinese intrusions in the centuries old Tibetan Buddhist practice of recognition of reincarnated lamas and in particular its intention to meddle in the reincarnation of the Dalai Lamas. The forum will also discuss the larger ramifications of the Vatican’s agreement to recognize the Bishops appointed by China.

### **Detailed Narration of the Central Theme:**

China is one of the worst violators of freedom of religion and belief. Even though the Chinese government recognizes five religious groups namely Buddhists, Taoists, Muslims, Catholics, and Protestants under the umbrella of “Patriotic Religious Associations”, it continues to meddle in to control their religious beliefs and traditions. Religious groups outside of the government’s control are referred to as “heterodox teachings” (CHN: *xie jiao*), which subjects them to torture, physical abuse, arrest, detention, imprisonment, and harassment. Evidence is mounting about

potential adverse human rights impacts on religious minorities in China, including Tibetan-Buddhists, Protestants, Muslims, Falun Gong practitioners and Catholics.

The Chinese government has already abducted the 11<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama Gedhun Choekyi Nyima within three days of his recognition by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. In fact this year is the 25<sup>th</sup> year since the enforced disappearance of the Panchen Lama Gedhun Choekyi Nyima on 17 May 1995. In his place, the CCP has appointed their own Panchen Lama after rigging the selection process to ensure that a son of Communist party member's son is installed into one of the highest religious seats of Tibet.

The CCP—officially an atheist party—is now insistent on interfering with the appointment of the next His Holiness the Dalai Lama. For decades, Chinese authorities have attacked and denounced His Holiness as a “wolf in monk's robes” and a “dangerous splittist”. However, they now want to have a say in his succession.

From regulating online religious activities to demolishing two of the largest Tibetan Buddhist institutes, Larung Gar and Yachen Gar by evicting more than 10,000 monks and nuns and subjecting them to “patriotic re-education camps”, China has been consistently persecuting the Tibetan Buddhists with impunity. Six UN Special Rapporteurs issued a joint statement to China condemning the mass expulsions from the two religious institutes. In a sharply worded statement, the rapporteurs expressed “grave concern [...] over the serious repression of the Buddhist Tibetans' cultural and religious practices and learning in Larung Gar and Yachen Gar.”

New administrative measures have been introduced to allow China to control internal monastic affairs through the monastic management committees of the institutes controlling a range of areas including admissions, management, finances, security and administrative matters. China has been meddling with the religious traditions of Tibetan Buddhists. In January 2007, China's State Administration of Religious Affairs issued a new regulatory measure called “Order No. 5” on “management measures for the reincarnation of living Buddhas in Tibetan Buddhism.” The decree makes it compulsory for all the Tulkus (reincarnated teachers) to register and get government approval to practice. Article 2 of the regulation says that “reincarnating living Buddhas shall not be interfered with or be under the dominion of any foreign organization or individual” and shall be (Article 7) “recognized by the provincial or autonomous regional Buddhist Association or the China Buddhist Association in accordance with religious rituals and historically established systems.” Currently China has been keeping a database of “living Buddha” authorised by the government in complete disregard to the religious traditions and beliefs of Tibetans.

Similarly Muslims in China are also facing persecution. China has detained upwards of 1 million Uighurs in detention camps and re-education centres aimed at “curing” Uighurs Muslims of their religion and grooming them to be loyal to the CCP. Inside the camps, detainees are forced to learn Chinese, sing patriotic songs, as well as memorize rules applicable to Uighurs and other Muslims such as not speaking Uighur language in public. With Chen Quanguo appointment as the Party Secretary of East Turkestan (CHN: Xinjiang) in 2016, the grid-strategy implemented in Tibet has become the blueprint for crackdown on millions of Uighurs in the region. After Quanguo took power, the number of police-related job advertisements skyrocketed from 9000 job posts pre-2016 to 32, 000 in 2016, and over 60,000 in 2017.

The CCP has come down strongly on Christians as well, particularly the house churches. Many house churches have been forcibly shut down along with their pastors and leaders being arrested and sentenced. Around 500 house church leaders signed a statement narrating the instances of forceful removal of crosses from buildings, forceful hoisting of Chinese flags, singing of patriotic songs and barring of minors from attending the congregations. The sale of Bibles are controlled and barred from being sold online. The Bibles are being translated according to State’s perception and to make it more “Chinese.”

The Falun Gong practitioners were also persecuted in 1999. The CCP banned its practice and carried out nation-wide persecution of the followers of Falun Gong. The authorities mobilized the state media apparatus, judiciary, police, army, the education system, families and workplaces against the group. The China Tribunal passed a judgement calling China a criminal state for carrying out systematic torture, illegal imprisonment, forced labour, organ harvesting and abusive psychiatric measures, with the apparent aim of forcing practitioners to recant their belief in Falun Gong. Foreign observers estimate that hundreds of thousands and perhaps millions of Falun Gong practitioners have been detained in “re-education through labour” camps, prisons and other detention facilities for refusing to renounce spiritual practice.

## **Objective**

The 2020 Geneva Forum aims to achieve 3 crucial objectives:

1. To understand and analyse the religious persecution being carried out in territories under Chinese rule;
2. To bring forth the global impact of the repressive policies of CCP on religious freedom;
3. To strategize and develop multilateral co-ordinated efforts to stop Chinese government’s interferences in selection of religious figures and leaders.

## Methodology

The one-week virtual forum will be structured into four different panels, each with a specific area of focus. The panel discussion will take the form of a participatory dialogue and also receive questions from live audience. The Forum shall, *inter alia*, bring together China focused human rights groups and representatives of various religious groups with the goal of setting up a coordinated multilateral approach in challenging China's deteriorating human rights record. The Forum shall also examine the role of governments, private sectors, international organizations, and civil society groups in addressing religious persecution in China.

To accommodate speakers and audiences from different parts of the world, we have decided to hold one panel discussion per day spread across a week. The Virtual Geneva Forum Week will commence on 9 November 2020 with an inaugural panel followed by four panels on each day and culminate on 13 November 2020. The panel discussions will generally be held for one and half hours and the timings would be 7 to 8:30 pm (India time), 2:30 to 5:00 pm (Geneva time) and 8:30 to 10: 00 am (New York time).

## Virtual Geneva Forum Week Schedule

[Timings: 7 to 8:30 pm (India time), 2:30 to 4:00 pm (Geneva time) and 8:30 to 10: 00 am (New York time)]

9 Nov. 2020 : Inaugural Panel

10 Nov. 2020 : Panel 1: China's Policy on Freedom of Religion under the Global Framework

11 Nov. 2020 : Panel 2: Religious Persecution: Crackdown on People of Faith in China

12 Nov. 2020 : Panel 3: Tibetan Buddhist System of Reincarnation and Why China wants to control it?

13 Nov. 2020 : Panel 4: Countering China's Persecution of Believers: Way Forward

## Platform

The Geneva Forum 2020 will be held via BlueJeans app which will be broadcasted live on Tibet TV networks. Live questions (form of comments) will be accepted from the audience.

## Expected Outcomes of 2020 Geneva Forum

The Geneva Forum expects to build a network of organizations and experts focusing on human rights and religious freedom in China to help develop coordinated efforts to challenge and improve China's human rights record. It also expects to strengthen mainstream media attention and public discourse on the deteriorating human rights record in the most remote parts under the rule of the CCP.

## Contact Details

### Organizer

The Tibet Bureau

Office of the Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Place de la Navigation 10, Ch-1201 Geneva

Switzerland

+41-2273-87940

genevaforum@tibetoffice.ch | info@tibetoffice.ch

\*\*\*\*\*

### Official Media Partner

Tibet TV; Tibet.net (English); bod.asia (Tibetan); and xizang-zhiye.org (Chinese)

**Live Broadcast:** Tibet TV Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/CTATIBETTV>

\*\*\*\*\*

### Website Design and Developed by

Tibetan Computer Resource Center, Central Tibetan Administration

\*\*\*\*\*

### Print and Posters

Narthang Press, Central Tibetan Administration