

# GENEVA FORUM 2023

OCTOBER 26 - 27



HUMAN RIGHTS IN DECLINE: REGIONS UNDER CHINA



Department of Information and International Relations  
&  
Office of Tibet, Geneva

CENTRAL TIBETAN ADMINISTRATION

# GENEVA FORUM 2023

## HUMAN RIGHTS IN DECLINE: REGIONS UNDER CHINA

Centre International de Conférences Genève  
26-27 October 2023



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## **GENEVA FORUM 2023**

### **Human Rights in Decline: Regions Under China**

#### **Introduction**

The human rights situation in regions under the People's Republic of China has been seeing a downward trend since its inception in 1949. In recent times, the rights situation has deteriorated as evidenced by numerous reports. At the same time, China is aggressively pushing its agenda to redefine the universally-accepted principles of human rights and intervene in international human rights protection mechanisms.

In order to uphold the universality of human rights and to bring spotlight on the ground situation in regions under the People's Republic of China, a forum focusing on human rights and China has become more crucial than ever.

The Geneva Forum was conceived in the backdrop of the third cycle of Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of China. The first Geneva Forum was held on 2 November 2018. Following positive reception based on overwhelming encouraging feedback, a day-long forum evolved into a two-day event to ensure that all major issues concerning the central theme were discussed and deliberated extensively.

The second Geneva Forum was held from 14 to 15 November 2019 to discuss "China's High-Tech Repression and Freedom of Religion." The third Geneva Forum was held on the central theme "China's Policy on Freedom of Religion." However, it was re-programmed into a week-long virtual program from 9 to 13 November 2020 due global pandemic. The fourth Geneva Forum was held from 1 to 2 November 2021 on the theme of "Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Violations by China."

The Geneva Forum has evolved into a unique platform for human rights experts, practitioners, academicians, activists, governments, diplomats, think tanks, civil society groups and the affected groups to assess and evaluate the human rights situation in regions under the

Chinese government. This includes Tibet, East Turkestan, Southern Mongolia, Hong Kong and also affected countries like Taiwan. The forum aims to develop a network amongst like-minded groups to advance a coordinated multilateral approach to counter, challenge and hold China accountable for its worsening human rights record.

### **Central Theme for the Fifth Geneva Forum**

The Fifth Geneva Forum 2023 will deliberate on the theme titled “Human Rights in Decline: Regions Under China.” In recent times, the human rights situation in regions under China have witnessed steady decline and deterioration. According the Freedom House, Tibet remains the least free region in the world for the five consecutive years. Nearly one million Tibetan children are being assimilated through forced residential schools. The concentration camps and forced labour training programs in Tibet and East Turkestan have drawn worldwide condemnation. The cultural and linguistic identity of Tibetans, Uyghurs and Southern Mongolians are threatened by China’s policies in these regions. The forum will therefore report and deliberate on the declining human rights situation in regions under China. Furthermore, considering the upcoming fourth UPR cycle of China to be held in January-February 2024, the forum will also discuss and review the rights record of China.

### **Thematic Panels**

1. Human Rights Trends: Situation in Regions Under China
2. Silencing Voices: China’s Assimilationist Policy and Crackdown on Defenders
3. Development or Neo-Colonization? - Tibet and Regions under China
4. China’s Global Footprints: Surveillance and Transnational Repression

### **Issues to be Discussed under Each Panel**

The first panel “Human Rights Trends: Situation in Regions Under China” will deliberate on the overall human rights situation in regions under China especially Tibet, East Turkestan, Southern Mongolia,

Hong Kong as well as other regions of the People's Republic of China. The experts will offer insights into the human rights situation under PRC, with special focus on rights situation under Xi Jinping.

The second panel "Silencing Voices: China's Assimilationist Policy and Persecution of Defenders" will deliberate on China's aggressive implementation of assimilationist policy in regions under its rule especially aimed at destruction of unique language, identity, religion and culture of Tibetans, Uyghurs, Southern Mongolians and others affected groups. It will also deliberate on the systematic persecution of defenders including arbitrary detention, torture, disproportionate sentencing, and custodial deaths of defenders.

The third panel "Development or Neo-Colonization? - Tibet and Regions under China" will deliberate on the truth behind the "development narrative" that China is desperately trying to build to whitewash and conceal the ground realities in Tibet, East Turkestan, Southern Mongolia, and other regions. The experts will evaluate the forced labour allegations, destruction of the environment through mining, violations of economic rights as well as colonialist policies of China in regions under its rule.

The fourth panel "China's Global Footprints: Surveillance and Transnational Repression" will highlight and discuss the massive surveillance set up by the Chinese government to monitor and control the people under its rule. Tibetans, Uyghurs, Southern Mongolians who are especially vulnerable are subjected to massive DNA collection, iris scan, biometric scans etc. Furthermore, by establishing "secret" police stations in foreign countries China is carrying out transnational repression at an unprecedented scale to silence voices of dissent abroad. Its footprints in Africa, Latin America and Asia through debt-diplomacy are destroying not only the democratic systems but also the environment.

### **Expected Outcomes of Geneva Forum 2023**

The Geneva Forum expects to build a network of organizations and experts focusing on human rights and religious freedom in China and 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.



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## FORUM SCHEDULE

**Venue: International Conference Center Geneva (CICG)  
Switzerland  
26-27 October 2023**

### **Day One: Thursday, 26 October 2023**

#### **Inaugural Session**

- 10:00hr Welcome Address by Mr. Tenzin Lekshay  
*Additional Secretary, Department of Information and  
International Relations, Central Tibetan Administration*
- 10:05hr Address by Mr. Arunas Valinskas  
*Honorable Member of Parliament, Lithuania*
- 10:20hr Address by Ms. Isabelle Pasquier-Eichenberger  
*Honorable Member of Parliament, Switzerland*
- 10:35hr Address by Ms. Norzin Dolma  
*Kalon (Minister), Department of Information and  
International Relations, Central Tibetan Administration*
- 10:55hr Vote of Thanks by Ms. Rigzin Genkhang  
*Representative, Office of Tibet, Brussels*
- 11:00hr Networking Coffee/Tea



11:30hr **Panel Session- 1**  
**Human Rights Trends: Situation in Regions Under China**

Moderator: **Ms. Rigzin Genkhang**  
*Representative, Office of Tibet, Brussels*

**Speakers:**




-  **Ms. Rushan Abbas**  
*Founder & Executive Director of Campaign for Uyghurs*
-  **Mr. Dugarjab L. Hotala**  
*Founder and Director of InterMongol Network*
-  **Dr. Xiao Qiang**  
*President and Editor-in-Chief of China Digital Times*
-  **Ms. Tenzin Dawa**  
*Executive Director, Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy*

13:00hr Lunch Break

14:30hr **Panel Session- 2**  
**Silencing Voices: China's Assimilationist Policy and Crackdown on Defenders**

Moderator: **Mr. Sonam Frasi**  
*Representative, Office of Tibet, London*

**Speakers:**

-  **Dr. Gyal Lo**  
*Tibetan activist and Educational Sociologist*
-  **Mr. Benedict Rogers**  
*Co-founder and CEO of Hong Kong Watch*
-  **Dr. Emile Dirks**  
*Research Associate, Citizen Lab*

16:00hr Coffee/Tea Break

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**Day Two: Friday, 27 October 2023**

11:00hr Networking Coffee/Tea

11:30hr **Panel Session- 3**

**Development or Neo-Colonization? Tibet and Regions under China**

Moderator: **Dr. Tenzin Lhadon**

*Research Fellow, Tibet Policy Institute*

**Speakers:**



**Prof. Dibyesh Anand**

*Head of School of Social Sciences, University of Westminster*



**Dr. Martin Mills**

*Senior Lecturer, University of Aberdeen, Scotland and  
Director of the Scottish Centre for Himalayan Research*



**Ms. Lhadon Tethong**

*Director, Tibet Action Institute*

13:00hr Lunch Break

14:30hr **Panel Session- 4**

**China's Global Footprints: Surveillance and Transnational Repression**

Moderator: **Mr. Tenzin Lekshay**

*Additional Secretary, DIIR, Central Tibetan Administration*

**Speakers:**



**Ms. Yaqiu Wang**

*Research Director for China, Hong Kong and Taiwan,  
Freedom House*



**Mr. Josh Rogin**

*Foreign Policy Columnist, Washington Post*



**Dr. Tenzin Lhadon**

*Research Fellow, Tibet Policy Institute*

16:00hr Coffee/Tea Break

### **Valedictory Session**

16:30hr Welcome Address by Mr. Tenzin Lekshay  
*Additional Secretary, Department of Information and  
International Relations, Central Tibetan Administration*

16:35hr Address by Mr. Nicolas Walder  
*Honorable Member of Parliament, Switzerland*

16:45hr Address by Ms. Nicole Su  
*Director General of the Taipei Cultural and Economic  
Delegation in Geneva*

16:55hr Address by Ms. Norzin Dolma  
*Kalon (Minister), Department of Information and  
International Relations, Central Tibetan Administration*

17:05hr Vote of Thanks by Ms. Rigzin Genkhang  
*Representative, Office of Tibet, Brussels*



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## Theme 1

### **Human Rights Trends: Situation in Regions Under China**

The human rights situations in various regions under the PRC government's control such as East Turkestan, Tibet, Southern Mongolia, and Hong Kong, have emerged as critical global issues, sparking profound concerns about the safeguarding of basic human rights. These regions, each marked by its unique cultural and political dynamics, have become focal points of concern due to reports of human rights abuses, political repression, cultural assimilation, and the erosion of autonomy over the decades. The implementation of policies such as the Second-generation Ethnic Policy, Zero-Covid Policy, Second Generation Bilingual Education Policy, suppression of any signs of dissent, including manifestations of religious beliefs and cultural identity has accelerated the sinicization of the Tibetans, Uyghurs, Southern Mongolians and others under the PRC government's occupation.

In 2022, the UN special rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, Tomoya Obokata, uncovered forced labor in East Turkestan, affecting Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and other groups of peoples through state-mandated systems like vocational education center placements and transferring rural labor for poverty relief. Similar practices were found in the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region, pushing farmers, herders, and rural workers into low-wage jobs. The report suggested some cases could amount to enslavement and called for an independent investigation as a crime against humanity. These coerced labor efforts also compelled these peoples with their distinct cultural identities to assimilate into new environments, away from their traditional settings.

A report by a rights group monitoring the human rights situation in Tibet has characterized Tibet as a "Giant Open Prison." This is reflected in successive reports by the Freedom House in their reports since 2021, ranking Tibet among the world's least free nations, a ranking maintained in Freedom House's Freedom in the World 2023 report. In

2022, due to China's stringent zero-COVID policy in Tibet, Tibetans face increased surveillance and harsh consequences, with people in Lhasa being confined to stadiums, schools, and unfinished buildings. Protests against the lockdown, which had been in effect since August 8, began online in September and escalated to street demonstrations on October 27, with individuals across Tibet arrested for sharing COVID-related content online. As many as 94 Tibetans were known to have been unfairly detained and arrested by the Chinese authorities in 2022. Among them, Chinese courts sentenced 14 Tibetans to prison term ranging from two to fourteen years on trumped-up charges of "inciting separatism", "endangering state security", and "leaking state secrets." At least five Tibetan political prisoners are reported to have died as a result of torture in 2022. In 2021, two Tibetans, Tenzin Nyima, 19 and Kunchok Jinpa, 51, died after being severely beaten and tortured by the Chinese authorities during their detention. In some cases, Chinese authorities released Tibetan prisoners prematurely in near-death conditions to prevent deaths in prison. The true number of such cases is unknown due to extreme information control in Tibet.

In 2008, Tibetans from across Tibet protested against China's rule over Tibet and called for the return of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. These protests were violently suppressed, resulting in the intensified implementation of a repressive surveillance system in Tibet. Since 2009, with limited space to express grievances, Tibetans have been compelled to take extreme forms of protest through self-immolation. Since then, 157 Tibetans have self-immolated themselves to protest the Chinese government's occupation and its oppressive policies in Tibet calling for freedom in Tibet and the return of His Holiness to the Dalai Lama.

In 2017, the Chinese government implemented "Deradicalization Regulations," codifying efforts to "contain and eradicate extremism." This has led to the detention of around 900,000 to 1.8 million Uyghurs, Kyrgyz, Kazakhs, and other predominantly Muslim people in high-security camps where human rights abuses, including torture and

sexual assault, have been documented. In addition to the internment camp system, hundreds of thousands of individuals were subjected to prison sentences, as confirmed by the Chinese government, which reported that 540,826 people were prosecuted in the region between 2017 and 2022. In 2020, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute's Xinjiang Data Project used satellite analysis to identify 385 detention centers in East Turkestan.

In May 2022, RFA reported that authorities detained approximately 30 teachers from one high school in Ghulja City in East Turkestan. Local authorities confirmed to RFA that most of the detained teachers had been sent to “re-education” centers but noted seven teachers were sentenced to prison. In September 2023, days leading up to China's National Day holiday, authorities in East Turkestan apprehended over 50 Uyghur villagers from two communities, including those who were underage during the 2017 mass arrests of Uyghur Muslims and those who had evaded capture. Many political prisoners including retired medical doctor Gulshan Abbas, entrepreneur Ekpar Asat, scholars such as Ilham Tohti, Hushtar Isa, and Rahile Dawut, who was recently sentenced to life imprisonment for her scholarly work on charges of endangering state security, remained either in prison or under other forms of detention.

The human rights situation in Southern Mongolia under China is equally dire. The people of Southern Mongolia live in fear of being arrested for openly criticizing the government, resulting in self-censorship and a lack of freedom of expression. This atmosphere of fear is fueled by instances of intimidation and over 10,000 arrests, detention, and imprisonment of those who opposed the 2020 school reforms. Authorities have even published lists of individuals suspected of “reprehensible behavior,” offering financial rewards for their arrest, indicating a severe clampdown on dissent and a disregard for human rights in the region. In May 2023, Lhamjab Borjigin, a Southern Mongolian historian, who had faced imprisonment and house arrest for criticizing the Cultural Revolution in his writings, was forcefully apprehended by Chinese authorities in Ulaanbaatar, months after

he had escaped to Mongolia in March, making this the fifth case of deportation of Southern Mongolians from Mongolia.

The human rights situation in Hong Kong has similarly been in decline over the last few years. Under the National Security Law and other repressive laws, increased and intensified crackdown on pro-democracy figures and legal actions against independent media outlets have restricted freedom of expression fostering a climate of fear and self-censorship sparking concerns about Hong Kong's future. Despite China's extensive surveillance at suppressing opposition and preventing any challenges to the authoritarian regime, the people of regions such as East Turkestan, Tibet, Southern Mongolia, and Hong Kong have displayed remarkable courage by risking their lives and everything they hold dear to speak out against numerous atrocities committed by the Chinese government.





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**Speakers Abstracts and Biographies:****Human Rights Situation and Genocide in East Turkestan**

The Uyghur genocide committed by the Chinese communist government is one of the most pressing and underreported human rights crises of our time. With mounting evidence and testimonies, the plight of the Uyghur people has increasingly gained global attention, demanding urgent action. The speaker will provide an overview of the historical and cultural background of the Uyghurs, highlighting their unique identity and the challenges they have faced within the Chinese regime. The lecture will then delve into the well-documented evidence of the systematic human rights abuses and atrocities being committed against them, including mass detentions, forced labor, cultural suppression, and other egregious violations. Additionally, the lecture will explore the complicity, responses, and policies of the international community. Various perspectives and arguments surrounding geopolitical factors and economic interests will be analyzed to paint a comprehensive picture of the issue. Moreover, the lecture aims to engage attendees in a thought-provoking discussion about the moral imperative to act in the face of such grave violations of human rights. It will emphasize the importance of raising awareness, advocating for justice, supporting affected communities, and pressuring governments to uphold their obligations. Ultimately, this lecture intends to galvanize individuals to become active voices against the Uyghur genocide and inspire collective action to hold accountable those responsible for these atrocities. It is imperative that we strive to bring this shadowed crisis into the spotlight and work towards a world in which human rights are universally respected and protected.



**Rushan Abbas**, a Uyghur American activist, has dedicated her life to championing the rights of the Uyghur people. Beginning her advocacy during her time at Xinjiang University, she led pro-democracy protests in 1985 and 1988. She co-founded the Uyghur Overseas Student and Scholars Association in 1993 and played a



pivotal role in establishing the Uyghur American Association in 1998 and was elected as its Vice President for two terms. In response to Beijing's escalating genocidal actions against Uyghurs in 2017, Abbas co-founded the Campaign for Uyghurs (CFU). This organization advocates for Uyghur human rights and democratic freedoms, rallying the international community against the atrocities in East Turkistan. She pioneered the "One Voice One Step" movement, orchestrating a global protest on March 15th, 2018, across 14 countries and 18 cities against China's mass Uyghur detentions. Her sister's abduction followed her first public speech in September 2018 as retaliation for Rushan's activism. In 2020, CFU released the report "Genocide in East Turkistan," meticulously detailing how China's actions align with the Genocide Convention. Notably, CFU received a Nobel Peace Prize nomination in February 2022 for its relentless advocacy. Rushan Abbas engages with global lawmakers, briefing them on East Turkistan's human rights crisis. Testifying before the US Senate and Congress multiple times, she sheds light on the Chinese regime's genocide and crimes against humanity. Rushan currently serves as a lived experienced expert on the Inter-Parliamentary Taskforce on Human Trafficking and as the Advisory Board Chair of the Axel Springer Freedom Foundation.



## **Human Rights Situation and Cultural Genocide in Southern Mongolia**

The Chinese government's decades-old campaign of cultural genocide against the Mongols in Southern Mongolia is a deeply concerning issue. The current phase, which began on September 1, 2020, represents the most intense and far-reaching assault on Mongol culture and identity since the end of the Mao era. It appears to be intended as the final blow aimed at eradicating the entire Mongol Nation within the People's Republic of China's jurisdiction.

Starting on September 1, 2020, the Chinese state initiated measures to replace the Mongol language as the medium of instruction in Mongol

schools with Chinese, all under the guise of preserving some aspects of Mongol language education. However, the situation escalated significantly as of September 1, 2023, with the complete prohibition of Mongol language instruction in all educational institutions, from kindergartens to advanced levels, both as a subject and as the language of instruction. The Chinese government's ultimate objective is the complete erasure of Mongol uniqueness, compelling assimilation into the Chinese identity.

This multifaceted campaign encompasses several distressing aspects:

- **Forced Assimilation:** Citizens of all ages, including kindergarteners and college students, face immense pressure to abandon their native Mongol language and culture in favor of adopting a Chinese identity
- **Pervasive Surveillance:** The widespread monitoring of individuals' personal and online activities is employed to enforce compliance with this policy. Any form of resistance is met with severe disciplinary actions.
- **Punishment for Cultural Expression:** Even the most benign expressions of Mongol culture, such as wearing traditional clothing or singing Mongol songs, are harshly condemned and penalized as "narrow nationalism."
- **Destruction of Art and Heritage:** Traditional Mongol arts and cultural practices are systematically replaced by Chinese counterparts in public performances and broadcasts. Additionally, sacred Mongol sites are subjected to desecration.
- **Educational Suppression:** The cultural genocide extends into the educational system, where Mongol language and culture classes are systematically removed from curricula. The Chinese government labels these classes as emphasizing "ethnic identity" to the detriment of a "Chinese nationality common identity."
- **Publication Bans:** Mongol-language publications and books are outright banned, and printing services are prohibited from reproducing materials in Mongol.
- **Indoctrination Through Training:** A comprehensive training program is used to indoctrinate Southern Mongols with Chinese

nationalism and ideology. Trainees are coerced into confessing past “mistakes,” including their involvement in activities that highlighted Mongol culture.

This abstract underscores the systematic and comprehensive nature of the campaign, revealing a deeply troubling attempt to erase the Mongol language and cultural heritage while coercing assimilation into a homogenous Chinese culture.



**Dugarjab L. Hotala** is the founding director of InterMongol Network, a US-based Non-Governmental Organization aimed at preserving and promoting the cultural as well as kinship ties between all parts of the greater Mongol Nation. Born and raised in the Jungar region of Western Mongolia, presently the northern part of the so-called ‘Xinjiang’ or East Turkestan, Mr. Hotala traveled to and lived in all three major regions that are presently being colonized under Communist China, namely Xinjiang, IMAR, and Tibetan regions. Additionally, he lived as an undocumented refugee among Tibetans in Northern India, mainly in Dharamsala for a period of six and a half years. Mr. Hotala has been actively engaged with the Southern Mongolian struggle ever since the mid-1990s, with the establishment of the underground ‘Mongol Motherland Party’ in the occupied region. After his departure from the PRC, he became actively involved with the activities of the Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Centre (SMHRIC) since 1998, and since then continually taking part in lobbying activities targeting US Congress, Senate, and state representatives as well as state assemblies of states of New York, Colorado, and Michigan on issues regarding human rights violation cases in the China-occupied Mongolian regions. Currently, he resides in Chicago, IL, USA.

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### **China's Role in Global Digital Repression**

The lecture will discuss China's growing influence in the realm of digital technology and its implications for global digital authoritarianism. China, through its advanced technologies and tight control over domestic tech giants, is exporting models of surveillance and censorship. The government leverages artificial intelligence and big data to create an extensive domestic mass-surveillance system, citing the goals of a "safe society" and "smart cities." Chinese technology companies, often aligned with the CCP's interests, exert significant influence globally. Domestically, these companies operate under the concept of "cyber sovereignty," which justifies the stringent censorship and data localisation laws. This approach has led to the replacement of foreign tech companies like Google and Facebook with domestic equivalents, thereby creating a controlled digital environment. Internationally, China has become a major exporter of surveillance technologies, aiding governments worldwide, including those with questionable human rights records. It has also entered alliances with other authoritarian regimes to advance mutual digital repression strategies. China's global influence is further augmented by its heavy investments in international digital infrastructure, such as the "Digital Silk Road," and its attempts to set international digital standards. For instance, Huawei and other state-run enterprises have proposed a new standard for core network technology, embedding the potential for digital repression globally. The rise of digital authoritarianism in China poses a challenge to global democracies. There is an urgent need for international cooperation to promote online freedom and privacy while countering China's growing digital influence.



**Xiao Qiang**, the President and Editor-in-Chief of China Digital Times ("CDT"), is a recognized expert on technology and human rights, especially on Chinese state censorship and surveillance. He is also a Research Scientist at UC Berkeley's School of Information and the director of the Berkeley Counter-Power Lab, an interdisciplinary faculty-student research group. Xiao is the recipient of the MacArthur Fellowship in 2001. In January 2015, Xiao was

named to Foreign Policy magazine's Pacific Power Index, a list of "50 people shaping the future of the U.S.-China relationship." Xiao was named on the list "for taking on China's Great Firewall of censorship.



### **Deteriorating Human Rights Situation in Tibet under Xi**

At a time when China is projecting itself as an important international player, gross human rights violations continue in Tibet, throughout the PRC, and globally. This presentation will look at how the human rights situation in Tibet has severely deteriorated, particularly since Xi Jinping became president of the People's Republic of China. Human rights abuses and political repression have risen to the level of 'crimes against humanity' in recent years, with an increasing number of cases of torture, extrajudicial killings, and enforced disappearances being committed in a wide-ranging and systematic manner. Harsh practices of forced cultural assimilation and ill-advised development, all in the name of 'stability maintenance' hints towards a possibility of complete abolition of Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law, which promised but rarely granted meaningful autonomous powers to ethnic minorities including Tibetans. This presentation will also look at how the PRC's long arm of repression extends beyond its borders to threaten, intimidate, and harass Tibetans in the diaspora communities, posing increasing threats to not just the community but more importantly, to the future trajectory of the Tibetan freedom movement. China's sophisticated use of transnational repression is designed to provoke a rupture between Tibetans in Tibet and Tibetans in exile. Lastly, the presentation will also look at the failure of the international community to hold China to account.



**Tenzin Dawa** is the executive director of the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD), a Tibetan non-governmental organisation founded in 1996 with the mission of monitoring human rights situation in Tibet and defending human rights and freedoms of Tibetans inside Tibet. Ms Dawa graduated with

an honours degree in Political Science from Delhi University and also earned a master's degree in Human Rights. Prior to joining TCHRD, she worked as an intern at the National Human Rights Commission of India. In spring 2020, Ms. Dawa served as an Anamax fellow at the Human Rights Law Centre, University of Nottingham. Ms. Dawa currently serves on the steering committee of the Asia Pacific for Refugee Rights Network (APRRN). She joined TCHRD as a researcher in August 2016 and was appointed the executive director of TCHRD in June 2023.





## Theme 2

### **Silencing Voices: China's Assimilationist Policy and Crackdown on Defenders**

The ethnic policies pursued by the Chinese Communist Party in its so-called autonomous regions have been primarily rooted in the principles of securitization, surveillance, and assimilation. Notably, the most oppressive measures have been applied upon colonized territories in Tibet, East Turkestan, Southern Mongolia where the CCP has implemented a range of strategies including the imposition of language restrictions and colonial boarding schools, the deliberate obliteration of sacred religious sites and institutions, the extensive gathering of genetic data, and the pervasive deployment of surveillance systems designed to restrict the flow of information and freedom of movement.

China's assault on Uyghur, Tibetan, Mongolian culture and others is a multi-faceted campaign that targets the very core of these peoples' identities. In occupied Tibet, the government has systematically enforced policies with the ultimate goal of erasing the unique identity, culture, and language of the Tibetan people. This has been facilitated through various means, such as promoting intermarriage between Han Chinese and Tibetans, state-sanctioned Chinese migrants transfer, the compulsory relocation of nomadic and rural communities, the establishment of colonial boarding schools along with forced closures of private Tibetan schools and tuition classes.

Over a million Tibetan children aged 4 to eighteen are being separated from their families and compelled to attend state-run boarding schools. Similar network of state-run boarding schools is also reported to run in East Turkestan with detrimental effect on cultural, religious and linguistic identities and loss of connection with families and communities as confirmed by statements of three UN human rights expert in September 2023. In 2020, the Chinese Government introduced the "Second Generation Bilingual Education," in Southern Mongolia, a policy that was already imposed East Turkestan in 2017

and Tibet in 2018. In the same year, a regional training program promoting a common Chinese identity was initiated. In September 2023, the Chinese government chose to replace mother tongue education in Southern Mongolia with Chinese, contradicting Article 4 of the PRC Constitution, which guarantees ethnic groups the right to use and develop their languages.

In East Turkestan, between one to two million Uyghurs and Turkic peoples have been detained in Vocational Skills Education and Training Centers and other facilities and now being used as forced labor in Chinese factory and subject to Chinese propaganda and physical abuse. Accounts from former detainees, including those compelled to serve as Mandarin instructors, along with Chinese Communist Party propaganda, confirms that Mandarin study plays a significant role within internment camps. For Uyghurs, their Islamic faith has been systematically repressed, with mass detentions and the demolition of thousands of mosques, all under the guise of structural safety concerns. Meanwhile, Mongolian culture has faced a relentless assault, ranging from the replacement of traditional art and performances with Chinese counterparts to the desecration of sacred sites and the removal of Mongolian signage, ban on Mongolian language books and publications. Similarly, Tibet over the years witnessed the Chinese government's deliberate and systematic attempt to annihilate the Tibetan linguistic, religious, and cultural heritage. From the demolition of Buddhist monasteries and statues to the reeducation camps and control of the Tibetan monastic institutions, the Chinese government is attempting to destroy the Tibetan Buddhist civilization and redesign the religion to fit their political agenda. Social, economic, cultural and political policies relentlessly carried out in these areas have massively impaired the culture, language, and damaged the traditional way of life across these occupied territories. These actions collectively represent a grave threat to the cultural heritage and unique identities of these communities, highlighting China's efforts to homogenize and assimilate diverse nationalities under its control.



Since the 18th Party Congress, repression has systemically intensified with the implementation of a sophisticated surveillance system across China and even more intensely in its autonomous regions. China's advanced AI technology coupled with a vast, extensive data including DNA information points to a dark Orwellian future. Extensive studies have found that over 1.2 million Tibetans were subjected to the arbitrary mass collection of DNA data that may be used as an additional repression tool. Similar DNA collection drive collection is also reported to have been carried out in East Turkestan.

The Chinese state policies in these regions encompass suppression of linguistic rights, the imposition of Chinese language and education, the stifling of cultural expression, arrests of dissenting writers and artists, and commodification of certain aspects of Tibetan culture for state interests. The Chinese government's deliberate manipulation of intangible cultural heritage of Tibetans, the Uyghurs, and Mongolians, constraining it to tightly prescribed parameters, is methodically employed to depict the distinct cultural legacies of these communities as mere extensions of Chinese heritage. This serves as a means for advancing the state propaganda and justify its authority over these contested territories.

Tibetan writers, intellectuals, environmentalists, community leaders, entrepreneurs, philanthropists, and artists have become the prime target of the Chinese authorities for their expression of views critical of the Chinese government. On 1 December, 2021, Rongwo Gendun Lhundup, a notable Tibetan writer, was sentenced to four years in prison on charges of "inciting separatism" after he published a collection of poems. Thupten Lodoe, a 34-year-old acclaimed Tibetan writer, was sentenced to four years and six months in prison again on trumped-up charges of "inciting separatism" on 14 June 2022 on suspicion of writing and publishing content deemed to be "endangering state security" and "harming ethnic unity." Other well-known Tibetan writers who are currently imprisoned include Pema Rinchen, Seynam, Gangbu Yudrum, Samdup, Tsering Dolma and Gangkye Drubpa Kyab.

They were all sentenced to four to fourteen years of imprisonment for “inciting separatism” and “endangering national security.”

Similarly, the suppression of human rights defenders in the Uyghur region has led to extended detention and even deaths among writers, scholars, musicians, and religious figures. This crackdown specifically targets Uyghur intellectuals, with many professors and scholars arrested without due process. This authoritarian trend in East Turkestan is reminiscent of past actions in Southern Mongolia during the 1950s when over 20,000 intellectuals were persecuted for advocating for autonomy. Southern Mongolia also faced protests in 2020 due to China's language policy, resulting in arrests, detentions, and casualties among protesters.

Similarly, China's imposition of the National Security Law (NSL) in Hong Kong since 2020 has led to a systematic crackdown on defenders of democracy and human rights with many fleeing the region and bring the city's civil society in shambles. The government since then have flagrantly interfered in the judiciary, suppressed political opposition, and promoted self-censorship, particularly in academia and education.



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**Speakers Abstracts and Biographies:****China's Secret Network of Colonial Boarding Preschools in Tibet**

Since 2013, China has been implementing a new preschool education policy as a part of compulsory education and is using the school system as the fundamental tool to violate the fundamental human rights for all people (right to life, right to safety, right to justice, right to education, right to nationality) in Tibet. Most alarmingly, China is violating the right of every Tibetan child to live in the care of their parents and families while receiving a Tibetan-centered education in Tibetan language and also the right of every parent to nurture, love and raise their child as they want. Since 2016, forcefully separating Tibetan children from families and communities so as to replace their psychological foundation with a Chinese identity is the main function of boarding preschools in Tibet which exist - secretly - in rural areas.

**Background and eyewitness testimony:**

One day in late November 2016, I received an alarming phone call from my brother. He said, "I need you to come home to check on your two grandnieces, something very strange is happening." "What's wrong with them?" I asked. He responded, "It seems that I might lose my grandchildren if something isn't done. They've started rejecting our food, disrespecting Buddhist statues, reducing their love for family and animals. They speak less and less of our language, and their emotional exchange with us is very different from before they attended this preschool."

On a Friday evening I went to the school gate. The gate door was locked, all the parents and relatives were waiting for school staff to open the door and let the kids come out one by one. My two grandnieces, 4 and 5 years old at the time, recognized me, and seemed uncomfortable with my picking them up. Usually, when they saw me coming home, they jumped on me without any hesitation. However, this time they did not treat me the same way as their great uncle, both waved their hands to me without any words. On the car ride home, I carefully observed them. When we arrived at home, they did not hug their grandparents and parents, and there was no emotional exchange

between them. During dinner, they remained silent and distant. At that moment, they were like strangers in their own home. These changes are rooted in psychological elements, I thought.

I witnessed the consequences of my two grandnieces being silent and emotionally distant, indicating that they were feeling uncomfortable speaking their mother tongue, and that they were detaching from their closest family members. To me, this is how the symptoms of cultural and racial genocide begin within the family unit. I asked my brother what would happen to him if he refused to send them to boarding preschool. He suddenly teared up and said that he had no choice, that the kids would be barred from getting an education for the rest of their lives. His name would be blacklisted to prevent him from receiving any form of benefits from the government, and he would have no access to the banking system and other public resources. He also said that most Tibetans disagree with this policy.

Though they had only been in a mandatory government-run boarding preschool for three months, the girls were already speaking to each other only in Mandarin. It was truly remarkable because, just three months before, they were speaking only in Tibetan. As an educational sociologist, this caught my attention. I asked my two grandnieces about their school experiences including teachers and teaching methods. The older one said that on the first day of school several kids pooped and peed in pants because they were nervous due to the lack of communication between us and teachers, and these Chinese teachers can't understand a single Tibetan word. Pedagogically, teachers would bring different Chinese cultural artifacts every day, ask them to close their eyes and imagine the objects, then draw what they have imaged, and then guide them to explain what they've drawn in Mandarin.

As a young mother said: "I wanted to hug my 4- and 5-year-old kids when I came back home from exhausted field work every day, but the kids were not there. My life got extremely difficult mentally and physically, so as young mothers we organized a group walking Lhasa from home over 1200 kilometers to heal our mental difficulty."

My grandnieces' case is not unique. The findings of my three years of fieldwork, it is clear that the boarding preschool becomes a battleground between Tibet and China for the future survival of Tibet's civilization. "There are at least 800,000 other Tibetan school children affected by these policies. This number represents approximately 78% of Tibetan students between the ages of six and 18 and does not include an unknown number of four- and five-year-old who are also living in boarding schools," according to a report by Tibet Action Institute.



**Dr. Gyal Lo** received his PhD from the University of Toronto, and was awarded Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Fellowship for his research entitled "Culturally-Relevant Education for Minority and Rural Village in Asia." He taught as a faculty member at the Department of Tibetan

Language and Culture for over a decade, the Northwest University for Nationalities. He worked as a prioritized Full Professor at the Yunnan Normal University. His research interests cover Educational Sociology, Tibetan Buddhism in Society, Mother Tongue in schooling and its Policy, Social-Cultural Reproduction, Sociological Studies of Spirituality, and Multilingualism. In 2020, as the political climate changed, the YNU terminated his contract that he was a foreign Tibetan and thus a potential political liability in an increasingly authoritarian China. He left China in 2020 and has decided not to return as he can make a meaningful contribution to Tibetan education and alert the international community to the dire threats posed to the well-being of the Tibetan people and the survival of the Tibetan identity. He authored a Lexington Books: Social Structuration in Tibetan Society: Education, Society, and Spirituality.



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**China's Assimilationist Policy and Crackdown on Defenders**

The policy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regime is to silence dissent and repress ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic diversity throughout the territories it rules and occupies and beyond its borders around the world as well. Its objective is 'Sinicization', which means imposing Han nationalism, Mandarin Chinese language and loyalty to the CCP.

The situation in Tibet and for the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang (East Turkestan) region are the best examples of this policy in practice. For decades the CCP regime occupying Tibet has sought to repress and eradicate Tibetan culture, language and religion, through repression of Tibetan Buddhist monks, control of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, banning of portraits of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, removing Tibetan children from the families and placing them in colonial boarding schools, and changing the population demographics by bringing in significant numbers of Han Chinese into Tibet.

A very similar approach has been pursued in the Xinjiang region, with the closure or destruction of Uyghur Muslim mosques, the desecration of Muslim burial grounds, the marginalization of the use of the Uyghur language, and the arrest and imprisonment in prison camps of several million Uyghurs. Muslims who display any religious practice, such as fasting during Ramadan, abstaining from pork or alcohol, reading the Holy Quran or praying can be arrested, as can men who wear a beard of a certain length or women wearing head-coverings. Changing the demographics by encouraging the transfer of Han Chinese into the Xinjiang region, combined with a campaign of forced sterilization and forced abortion, are also part of this policy.

This approach is beginning to develop in Hong Kong as well, with the promotion of Mandarin Chinese language. Recently, the closure of a Cantonese language advocacy group, Societas Linguistica Hongkongensis (SLHK), following the raid by national security police of the home of its convenor, raised concerns about the potential suppression of Cantonese language in Hong Kong. As in Tibet and Xinjiang, Hong Kong has also experienced a change in



demographics in recent years, with many more mainland Chinese moving into the city.

Alongside this assimilationist policy, the CCP has been intensifying its crackdown on dissent throughout China and in Tibet, Xinjiang and Hong Kong, arresting and imprisoning lawyers, human rights defenders, bloggers, independent journalists, dissidents and religious leaders and closing down space for civil society.

The question for the international community is how to respond to this serious crackdown across China, and the atrocity crimes, including genocide and crimes against humanity, which the CCP is perpetrating. What more can be done to hold China to account?



**Benedict Rogers** is a human rights activist specializing in Asia, particularly China, Hong Kong, Myanmar and North Korea. He is the co-founder and Chief Executive of Hong Kong Watch, Senior Analyst for East Asia at the international human rights organisation CSW, co-founder and Deputy Chair of the UK Conservative Party Human Rights

Commission, a member of the advisory group of the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China, an advisor to the Stop Uyghur Genocide Campaign, and has served on the boards of several other charities. He is the author of seven books, including *The China Nexus: Thirty Years In and Around the Chinese Communist Party's Tyranny* (Optimum Publishing International, October 2022). He is a regular contributor to international media, including *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Spectator*, *Foreign Policy* and *The Diplomat*, has testified previously before the US Congress, the European Parliament and the UK Parliament and is a regular speaker at conferences and in the media around the world. He is the recipient of the International Religious Freedom Summit's award for Champion of Effective Advocacy, and the International Catholic Legislators Network's St Thomas More Award for advocacy for freedom of religion or belief.

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**PRC's Biometric Surveillance and State Control**

Original research published by the Citizen Lab demonstrates that under the administration of Xi Jinping, China's Ministry of Public Security has expanded police biometric data collection in Tibet. Between 2016 and 2022, police in the Tibet Autonomous Region collected DNA samples from an estimated one quarter to one third of the region's population. In Qinghai Province between 2019 and 2022, police collected iris scans from an estimated one fifth to one quarter of the province's population. In both the TAR and Qinghai, police targeted men, women, and children. Despite none of these people appearing to be suspected or convicted of criminal offenses, data collection appears to have been compulsory and often justified in the name of crime control.

This presentation will argue that police biometric surveillance in the TAR and Qinghai reflects both longstanding trends in Chinese policing, as well as the Xi administration's particular concern with national security and state control over non-Han and religious populations. This presentation will also argue that police biometric surveillance programs treat entire populations as potential threats to social stability, and violate the core rights of those living in the TAR and Qinghai.



**Dr. Emile Dirks** is a research associate at the Citizen Lab at the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy at the University of Toronto, where he explores state surveillance, policing, and politics in China. His research on biometric surveillance has been covered in *The New York Times*, *The Economist*, and *The Intercept*, among other publications. Previously, Emile served as a fellow at the Mercator Institute for China Studies and a research associate at the London School of Economics.





### Theme 3

#### **Development or Neo-Colonization? Tibet and Regions under China**

The government of the People's Republic of China's (PRC) development policies in Tibet and regions under its illegal occupation have been guided from the start by the political and strategic logics of bringing the regions under its strict control and to exploit its rich and untapped natural resources. Beijing boasts about Tibet's rapid development of roads, railways, and airports each time it issues a white paper, a cunning attempt to cover up egregious abuses of human rights in its colonized territories. The infrastructure development primarily benefits the Chinese military deployment in Tibet, as well as Chinese workers and residents migrating to Tibet, which, given the increasing influence of China, has grotesquely undermined the unique Tibetan identity of languages and cultural practices.

The rapid development of infrastructure in Tibet, as well as the extravagant budget set aside for development in China's previous "Five-Year Plans", intends to assimilate the Tibetan people and legitimize China's illegal rule. China's large-scale infrastructure projects in Tibet primarily serve political and economic interests, especially amid rising border tensions with India. The "Sichuan-Tibet Railway", though promoted as development infrastructure, plays a strategically vital role in facilitating the swift transportation of military personnel, materials, and logistical supplies, ultimately strengthening the military presence of the region to control the Tibetans and enhance border stability. Such infrastructure also boosts tourism generating state revenue while marginalizing the Tibetan people and their linguistics and cultural expression. At the same time, it expedites the resource exploitation, extraction, and transport to China, rather than genuinely benefiting the Tibetan people. An early piece of evidence appears in Hu Yaobang's statement following his visit to Lhasa in 1980 and finding that Tibetans had benefited nothing from Chinese financial assistance. In public, he described it as "plain colonialism" and questioned Chinese officials about where the assistance from

China had been used. China's construction of border villages is another pretentious project to the detriment of Tibetans and is intended to attract Tibetans to live in these border defense villages and serve as their ears and eyes when the Chinese army expands and secures its borders in the Himalayas.

Further, evidences of forced labor, arbitrary detention in concentration camps, involuntary DNA collection, and mandatory enrollment in boarding schools in Tibet have been reported. The extensive restrictions imposed on Tibetans violating their fundamental freedoms and rights, contradict the PRC government's claim of fostering development and welfare of the Tibetan people. This can be seen in how China plans and executes its initiatives in Tibet and other regions for education, poverty alleviation, employment, and environmental preservation.

### **Assimilationist Education Policies**

Local, mothertongue languages are poorly safeguarded in practice and have instead been the primary target of state sinicization campaigns in the last decade. In Tibet, Tibetan language education has gradually been phased out at primary and secondary level schooling in favor of a Chinese-medium instruction model. At least 70 percent of all schools across Tibet now use Chinese medium instruction, and all schools within the "TAR" have already completed the shift. The PRC government is implementing a number of initiatives, such as closing schools using Tibetan educational materials; banning materials that reference Tibetan Buddhism, identity, and history; and replacing village schools with colonial boarding schools across Tibet, where children are separated from their families from the age of four and lose their sense of belonging and identity.

Southern Mongolia's Education Department announced on 26 August 2020 that language classes for first-year students in elementary and middle schools will be taught in Mandarin. The policy has sparked fears that Mongolian culture and identity would be adversely affected, resulting in protests and strikes across the region.

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**“Poverty Alleviation Campaigns” and Forced Resettlement**

China’s nomad resettlement policy, often cited as a case exemplifying poverty alleviation and development, is in fact a counter example of poverty alleviation. In Tibet, Tibetans are forced to undergo resettlement or be subjected to persecution and harsh punishment. Under various Chinese policies, more than 2 million nomadic populations have been settled into sedentary homes since the 1980s. Moreover, over half a million Tibetans are being subjected to coercive labor training with enforced indoctrination, intrusive surveillance, military-style enforcements and harsh punishments. The Chinese government deprived Tibetans of their livelihood by grabbing agricultural land and forcing Tibetan nomads to relocate. Meanwhile, China is rounding up Tibetans into labor camps and factories for absolute subjugation under the name of ‘poverty alleviation’ and ‘development’. Therefore, Tibetan rural communities suffer deterioration in their quality of life, as well as their peaceful and harmonious relationship with Tibet’s wildlife and environment.

In East Turkestan, forced labor is described as an important component of Chinese government plans for the region’s economic development, particularly in textile and apparel manufacturing. The so-called poverty alleviation drive in East Turkestan, while constituting employment of more than half a million Uyghurs in State “vocational internment camps”, is actually intended to complete Uyghur assimilation through coercive labor, weaponized education, and intergenerational separation. For instance, a study by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute estimates that 80 thousand Uyghurs were deported from 2017 to 2020 to factories throughout China due to forced labor.

**Marginalized Employment Policies**

Tibetans have linguistic, educational, and cultural disadvantages in the job market due to the Han-dominated and Han-defined labor market. The promise of the authorities to create more jobs for Tibetan graduates has fallen short over the years, with a continuous flow of Chinese migrants resettling in Tibet in the name of development. Almost all professional jobs are still offered to Chinese, therefore

T Tibetans have difficulty finding employment. In the public sector, the Chinese government imposes biased eligibility criteria and preconditions on Tibetans who are seeking jobs, including “criticizing the Dalai Lama”, refraining from “separatist activities”, and cutting ties with Tibetans residing outside Tibet. Requirement for Tibetans to meet political qualifications to find jobs shows the Chinese government’s sense of deep insecurity and underscores its priority in Tibet is political correctness, with anyone who does not follow the official Chinese policy line having no chance of getting a job. In April 2023, six UN experts expressed concerns about China’s vocational training and forced labor programs in Tibet and found it to be eroding Tibetan identity, enforcing surveillance and political indoctrination, and potentially leading to coerced labor. Since 2015, hundreds of thousands of Tibetans have been coerced into low skilled, low-paid employment, despite the program being described as voluntary. As China seeks to promote Chinese culture and language dominance in Tibetan areas, the requirement for proficiency in Mandarin Chinese in tests and employment consideration has disadvantaged Tibetan students.

### **Environmental Destruction**

China’s “development” policies in Tibet are carried out without environmental assessment and consultation with the local community. China is increasingly building dams across Tibet’s transboundary rivers, potentially impacting over 1.8 billion people in the countries downstream, while scientists predict that temperatures on the Tibetan plateau will rise up to 4.6 degrees Celsius by the end of the century. With China’s aim to meet its targets of achieving carbon neutrality by 2060, the PRC government amidst the pandemic announced its plans to build a hydropower plant that could generate three times as much power as Three Gorges at the lower reaches of the Yarlung Tsangpo—a transboundary river that flows from Tibet into India and Bangladesh. The announcement came as part of the government’s 14th Five-Year plan, a series of guidelines spelling out PRC’s economic and social priorities.

China’s occupation of Tibet and its control over Tibet’s land and natural resources has caused significant degradation of the environment and

ecosystem in Tibet. This includes industrial projects such as unregulated and reckless mining, damming and deforestation. With China's repressive policies, Tibetans don't hold any agency in stewardship of their land and the few voices of Tibetan environmentalists and climate activists are silenced with detainment and decades-long imprisonment.

## **Conclusion**

Up to 1 million Tibetan children are forcibly sent to boarding schools where they are systematically cut off from their language and culture. Over 2 million Tibetan farmers, nomads, and other rural populations have been forcibly relocated in recent years. Tibetans who peacefully disagree with Chinese policies are subjected to persecution and severe government interference in their right to practice their faith. The PRC government has consistently denied accusations that it has implemented harsh tactics to assimilate Uyghurs and force them to adopt CCP ideas and give up their identity, including their language and culture. As a result, forced labor is still widespread in East Turkestan. China recently released guidelines to encourage the security and high-quality development of Southern Mongolia, with the goal of enhancing the region's capabilities to protect China's industrial, food, energy, and border security. It is evident that China's "development" policy in these regions is based mostly on its inability to assert total control there and to cover up its exploitations to the world.

The widespread discontent among the Tibetans and other colonized peoples under the PRC along with the government's heavy reliance on repressive tactics underscores the limitations of conventional metrics of living standards to determine development in Tibet. The current situation of Tibetans, marked by poverty and social inequalities, stem from a seven decades-long campaign of enforced assimilation into China's nation-building project, persistently marginalizing the Tibetan people within their ancestral territory. China has consistently misled and disregarded the international community by continuing to shun accountability for its atrocities and instead trumpets its development narrative.



## Speakers Abstracts and Biographies:

### Chinese Contemporary Colonialism

While China-ascendant geopolitics is an increasing reality and the focus in Asia and beyond is on how other states should cooperate, compete, adjust or contain China, what is often missed is the weaponization of emotions, sensitivity and “hurt” by the Chinese state. Any criticism of China on Uyghurs, Hong Kong or Tibet leads to a reaction along the lines of “this is our internal affairs”, “this hurts our national sentiments”. The speaker put forward the idea that “hurt”, “national humiliation”, and “national sensitivity” are politically constructed foreign policy tools for China. China is anti-imperialist in its foreign policy rhetoric while being beneficiary and even practitioner, rather than victim, of imperialism and colonialism. Modern nation-state of the People’s Republic of China is colonial in what it sees as its periphery. Focusing on Tibet, the speaker argues for an anti-colonial understanding of China as an emergent global power.



**Professor Dibyesh Anand** is the Head of the School of Social Sciences at the University of Westminster, UK. A professor of international relations, he is the author of monographs “Geopolitical Exotica: Tibet in Western Imagination”, “Tibet: A Victim of Geopolitics”, and “Hindu Nationalism in India and the Politics of Fear” and has spoken about, and published extensively on, varied topics including postcolonial politics and international relations, Tibet, China-India border dispute, Hindu nationalism, Islamophobia, and colonial practices of postcolonial states. He is on twitter @dibyeshanand.

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**The “Dimensions” of Power and Dynamics of Neocolonialism**

The history of colonialism is not simply one of capture, but of transformation, carried out not simply in the moment of colonization, but over decades and generations. On the Tibetan Plateau, this transformation is not just of sovereignty, but of the land, of economy and society religion, and - most importantly - of meaning. This last change - of meaning - is the most important for the long-term history of a people, precisely because it changes not just the world around them, but what they want, intend and aspire to.

The British sociologist Steven Lukes called this the 'third dimension' of power, and his way of thinking about this, I would suggest, helps us understand the dynamics of neocolonialism on the Tibetan Plateau today. The first dimension of power is simple brute force, like two boxers in a ring or two armies on a battlefield or even two sides of a debate or election: the one who wins is the one who has the greatest strength and the greatest numbers. This is probably where China has the strongest hand in Tibet today, and indeed on the world stage in general. Its sheer military and economic force overwhelmed Tibetan resistance both in 1950 and between 1956-1959. Similarly, its sheer economic muscle, its digital presence on the internet and its wolf-warrior diplomacy on the world stage allow it to win most debates by sheer strength and force of numbers.

The second dimension of power is what Lukes calls 'agenda setting': the capacity to enforce, through law and procedure, who gets to be in the ring, who gets to stand on the battlefield, whose voice is allowed in the debate. Again, this is an area where China is strong both internally and externally: its capacity to use the law within the PRC to rigorously suppress debate and protest, based on principles of national unity and loyalty, is extensive; on the world stage, its capacity to leverage UN regulations on non-interference and international norms based on nation-state status in order to exclude Tibetan voices and discourse from public awareness. China has in fact been particularly effective in manipulating Western political prejudices, norms and slogans in its favor in re-writing Tibetan realities.

Lukes' third dimension, however, relates to a more hidden, long-term process of power: that of creation and molding of meaning and purpose amongst members of a colonized society. This capacity is, ultimately, the bedrock of the other two, more superficial, dimensions. In regard to this third dimension, the PRC has historically proven far less effective, and in many regards rather inept, in Tibet, and some of their policies - including the infamous Patriotic Education campaigns - have arguably backfired in key ways. Nonetheless, it is clear - particularly with the almost complete banning of religious activities in many counties and the advent of the new boarding school policies. The most important examples here are, of course, the transformation of the idea of key incarnate lineages from being understood within the complex matrix of meaning that is Tibetan Buddhist spiritual and tantric practice and attainment to being a bureaucratic office of state religious policy, and the political transformation of monasteries from centers of religious and ritual practice to being sites of tourism and cultural heritage.

These transformations of meaning and purpose constitute the deepest form of cultural genocide, precisely because it destroys not just what people call things, who political leaders are and what laws they must follow, but also alters the very shape of value and purpose in people's lives. Once these have been transformed, then the colonization of a people, a land, a nation and a civilization is not simply complete, it is self-fulfilling. It is in this regard then, that the anti-colonial struggle in Tibet rests less on names and borders that might be held to 'contain' culture, but on the meanings and purposes that stand at their heart.



**Dr. Martin A. Mills** is Director of the Scottish Centre for Himalayan Research at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, where he is Senior Lecturer in the anthropology of Tibetan and Himalayan Societies. He is author of *Identity, Ritual and State in Tibetan Buddhism* (Routledge 2003) and numerous articles on Tibetan religious and state life, culture and history. Since 2007, he has been a regular member, briefings officer and Secretary of the Scottish Parliament



Cross-Party Group on Tibet, during which he was main author of parliamentary reports on aspects of Tibet's modern situation, including the 2008 protests and subsequent self-immolations, mass relocations across the Plateau, state policy regarding religion and, most recently, the 2021 report on climate change in the Third Pole Region. He regularly speaks to parliaments and groups around the world.



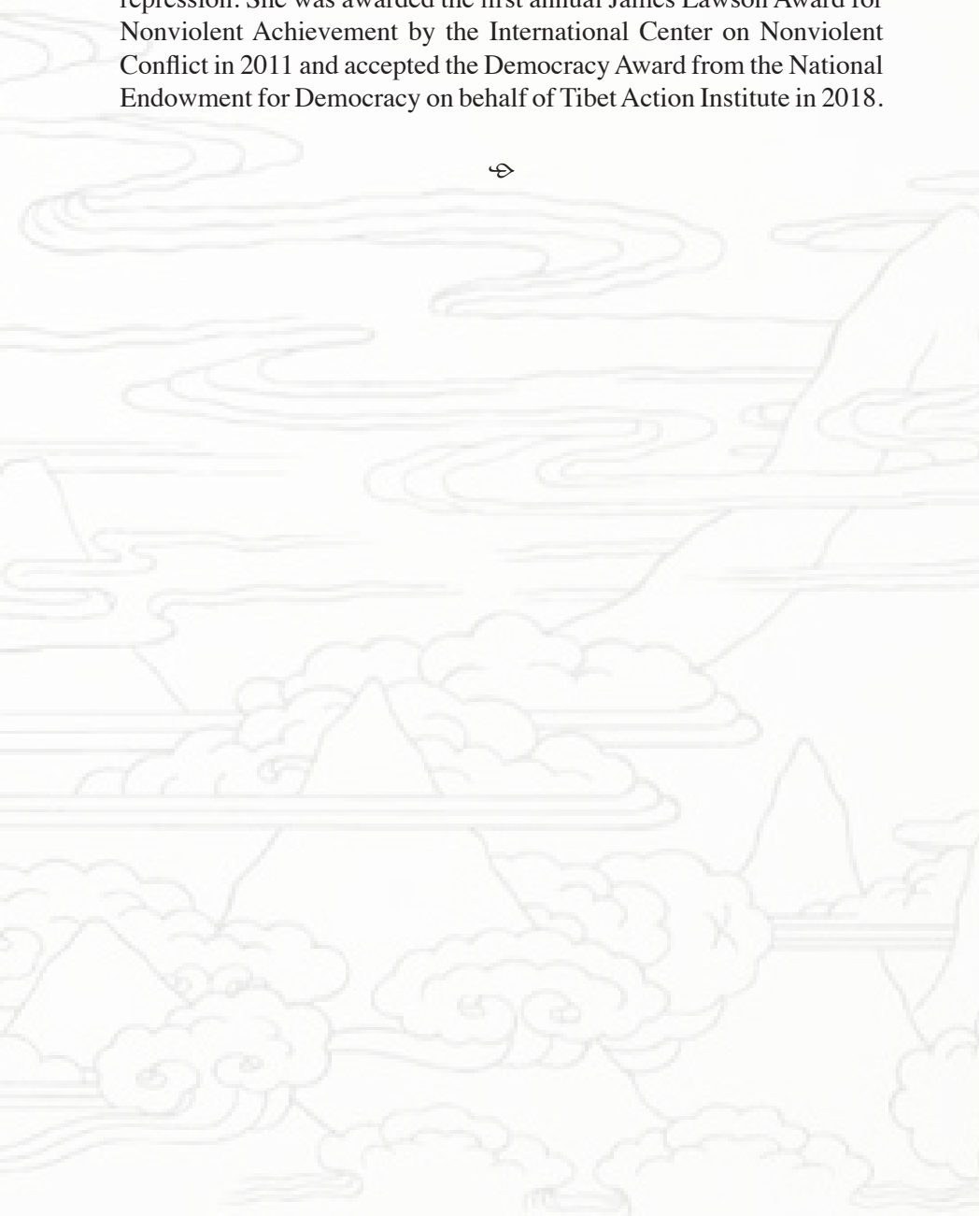
### **China's Hardline Campaigns And Elimination of Tibetan Identity**

The Chinese Communist Party has for decades tried to disguise large-scale colonial projects in occupied Tibet as benign “development” and “modernization” programs aimed at alleviating poverty and improving the lives of the Tibetan people. Since taking power in 2012, Xi Jinping has overseen a hard-line campaign to create a single Chinese identity with no room for ethnic and cultural differences. Under the hyper-nationalist logic that sees ethnic homogeneity and cultural uniformity as the only route to political stability, Xi's regime has pursued the elimination of the Tibetan identity, including its language, religion and traditional way of life. Nowhere does this eliminationist logic manifest itself more visibly than in the twin policy of nomad relocation and residential schooling system: the former entails the forced relocation and “retraining” of millions of Tibetan nomads and farmers, while the latter has led to the separation of at least one million Tibetan children from their parents and communities. This presentation will discuss the urgent need for the international community to recognize and oppose China's neo-colonial projects in Tibet, beginning with a call for the abolition of China's colonial boarding school system in Tibet and national common language policy.



**Lhadon Tethong** is the co-founder and director of Tibet Action Institute, where she leads a team of technologists, researchers and rights advocates developing strategies and innovative training, education, and technology programs for Tibetans and others living under extreme

repression. She was awarded the first annual James Lawson Award for Nonviolent Achievement by the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict in 2011 and accepted the Democracy Award from the National Endowment for Democracy on behalf of Tibet Action Institute in 2018.



## Theme 4

### **China's Global Footprints: Surveillance and Transnational Repression**

Xi Jinping's rule has been characterized by the acceleration of artificial intelligence (AI), repression of civil-society and ideological control. His tenure in China has seen a combination of communication crackdown, ramped-up propaganda, and rapid expansion of surveillance with the introduction of continuous efforts to bring new laws and changes in the Cyber Administration of China (CAC). Through the country's internet regulation law, CAC, China has strictly extended its iron grip and tightened control over the flow of information. Beijing spends billions of dollars annually on an "antidemocratic toolkit" of nongovernmental organizations, media outlets, diplomats, advisors, hackers, and bribes all designed to prop up autocrats and sow discord in democracies.

Inside Tibet, over the last decade, surveillance technologies referred to as the "nets in the sky and traps on the ground" have further suppressed the fundamental freedoms of expression, movement and assembly. New and highly advanced technologies have given unrestricted and illicit power to the state security apparatus to intensify and escalate mass surveillance. Checkpoints with smart surveillance and facial recognition are present in cities and at crossings between neighboring districts and provinces. Tibetans inside their homes are tracked through their phones and once they step outside surveillance and facial recognition technologies follow them wherever they go. This is the reality of today's Tibet under the People's Republic of China (PRC). The full extent and scale of China's oppressive surveillance system in Tibet — which could very well be more draconian than what has been documented so far — is yet to be ascertained due to the lack of access to Tibet. Surveillance in Tibet is widely characterized as "Orwellian." In addition to the traditional security surveillance measures in place including military, police, and neighborhood spies, modern surveillance technologies have been specifically developed and tested in Tibet.

The extensive security measures currently being practiced against Uyghur people were previously practiced and perfected in Tibet by Chen Quanguo, who earlier was the Party Secretary of the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). Following his highly repressive policies in “TAR”, Chen was appointed as the Party Secretary in the so-called Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and continues to be the chief architect of the massive surveillance and mass detention system in East Turkestan. China’s intensive use of high-tech surveillance, including AI and transnational repression, has further stifled the voices of the Tibetan people, leading to self-censorship. Under Xi’s authoritarian rule, through the manipulation of a series of new laws, Beijing continues to subdue freedom of expression and infringe directly upon individuals’ privacy and daily lives.

China’s repressive state control apparatus and violations of human rights are conducted through its surveillance networks such as the Great Firewall, surveillance grids, and new technologies for social control, which is aided by AI, biometric and other data collection to not only monitor but also to shape the minds and behaviors of its citizens. These are threats to fundamental rights of peoples oppressed by the PRC.

China’s long arm across borders to silence critics and dissents, among their diaspora and exile communities beside the virtual world has increased sharply in its aggressiveness and prevalence. Transnational repression is carried out in the forms of threats and family intimidation, abductions, illegal deportations and assassinations orchestrated by the PRC. Moreover, China’s transnational repression is a growing threat and concern for many governments and people in the free world as people are targeted anywhere in the world.

According to Freedom House, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) conducts the “world’s most sophisticated, comprehensive, and far-reaching campaign of transnational repression.” Therefore, it is unsurprising that the Chinese government uses transnational repression more than any other country in the world. The CCP

targets both individuals and groups abroad, including pro-democracy activists, human rights defenders, Tibetans, Uyghurs, Mongolians, Hong Kongers, Falun Gong practitioners, journalists and others who criticize the Chinese communist regime.

The global reach of China's repressive efforts in international and intergovernmental bodies is evident and grabbing much attention for all the wrong reasons, especially the sinicization of the United Nations. How a country that is guilty of committing most egregious human rights violations including genocide and invasion can be on the UN Security Council as a permanent member, and be reelected on the UN Human Rights Council with a mandate to "promote and protect human rights around the world" merits another discussion in itself. But the degree of China's active and aggressive expansion of its interference at the UN and persistent attempts to redefine human rights by promoting PRC's language of "human rights with Chinese characteristics" and having like-minded, authoritarian countries to praise China is unsettling.

Generating concerns in the international community, several democratic countries have condemned China's extraterritorial repression, including the United States which has introduced a bill called "Transnational Repression Policy Act" to curtail and counter transnational repression seeking to stifle and assault dissents living in the United States. This US bill seeks to establish US policy to hold accountable foreign governments and individuals perpetrating transnational repression when they stalk, intimidate, or assault people within the US and US citizens in foreign countries. More host countries adopting similar policies on China's transnational repression that would prioritize and ensure the protection and safety of its citizens and residents would act as a deterrent and make those foreign agents, government officials, etc. accountable for the violations of international human rights and the laws of the host countries. The height and scale of China's cross-border repression is extremely concerning, supplemented by the sophisticated surveillance tactics adopted by the authoritarian government, including the establishment

of over a hundred covert overseas Chinese police stations in more than 50 countries. If left unchecked and unresisted, the extent of the CCP's transnational repression could penetrate beyond exile communities, and into foreign parliaments and governments, and for that very reason, host countries are now contemplating to recognize China as an official threat to the safety and interests of one's country.





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**Speakers Abstracts and Biographies:****Abstract:**

According to Freedom House's research, the Chinese government conducts the world's most sophisticated, comprehensive, and far-reaching campaign of transnational repression. It is responsible for 229 of the 735 incidents of physical transnational repression recorded between 2014 and 2021, targeting people in at least 36 countries. The diverse tactics of transnational repression include renditions, unlawful deportations, assaults, digital surveillance and harassment, and coercion of family members and friends in the home country.

The CCP's campaign of transnational repression is a threat to the sovereignty, democratic institutions, and exercise of fundamental rights around the globe. Building resilience and imposing accountability are key to curbing the CCP's campaign of transnational repression. Awareness of the threat among law enforcement agencies helps to proactively protect potential victims and facilitates reporting by those targeted. Helping those targeted groups gain permanent lawful status can protect them from continued repression. Democracies should also impose targeted sanctions on those responsible for transnational repression.



**Yaqui Wang** (pronounced Ya-cho) is Research Director for China, Hong Kong and Taiwan at Freedom House, leading the organization's research on human rights issues within China and on the Chinese government's global influence. Wang has been frequently quoted by news outlets such as The New York Times,

The Wall Street Journal and The Guardian, and has appeared on BBC, CNN, NBC and others. She has published articles in Foreign Policy, The Washington Post, The Globe and Mail and elsewhere. Wang has testified a number of times before US Congress, and has served as a guest speaker at numerous universities. Prior to joining Freedom House, Wang was Senior China Researcher at Human Rights Watch, working on issues including internet censorship, freedom of expression, protection of civil society and human rights defenders,



and women's rights in China. Before Human Rights Watch, Wang worked on press freedom issues in China and other Asian countries for the Committee to Protect Journalists. Wang was born and grew up in China, and has a MA degree in International Affairs from George Washington University.



### **Abstract:**

As China ascends to global superpower status, it is imperative that we scrutinize its actions not only within its own territory but also in the international arena. In my own reporting, I have tried to shed light on China's extensive use of surveillance technologies and transnational repression tactics, both inside the United States around the world. It is crucial that we spark a global conversation on the implications for human rights, global security, and international relations.

This speech will delve into key aspects of China's global footprints: **Surveillance State Expansion:** I will examine how China's sophisticated surveillance apparatus, including facial recognition technology and the use of artificial intelligence, has expanded beyond its borders. This expansion raises concerns about the erosion of privacy rights, not only for its own citizens but also for individuals and communities worldwide.

- **Transnational Repression:** Drawing from my reporting, I will discuss the alarming trend of China's efforts to silence dissent and suppress opposition voices beyond its borders. The "long arm" of Chinese authorities has reached dissidents, human rights activists, and journalists in countries far from China's shores, sparking questions about the limits of national sovereignty in an interconnected world.
- **Economic leverage:** China's global economic influence plays a pivotal role in shaping the behavior of nations. We will explore how Beijing leverages its economic power to pressure other countries into aligning with its interests, thereby potentially compromising their own values and principles.

- **International responses:** My work has focused on varied responses of nations and international organizations to China's global footprints. We will discuss the challenges faced by governments, NGOs, and global institutions in addressing China's actions while maintaining diplomatic and economic relationships.
- **The Way Forward:** This speech will conclude by examining potential strategies for mitigating the negative impacts of China's global footprints. It will address the need for coordinated international efforts, stronger protection of human rights, and the role of civil society in holding China accountable for its actions.

As we confront the complex and multifaceted challenges posed by China's global reach, this speech will serve as a call to action for scholars, policymakers, and global citizens alike. By understanding the extent of China's global footprints and their implications, we can work towards a more transparent, equitable, and secure world order.



**Josh Rogin** is a columnist for the Global Opinions section of the Washington Post. He is also the author of *Chaos Under Heaven: America, China, and the Battle for the 21st Century*, released March, 2021 by Mariner Books. Previously, Josh has covered foreign policy and national security for Bloomberg View, Newsweek, The Daily

Beast, Foreign Policy magazine, Congressional Quarterly, Federal Computer Week magazine, and Japan's Asahi Shimbun. His work has been featured on outlets including CNN, NBC, ABC, CBS, FOX, MSNBC, NPR, and many more. Josh has been recognized with the Interaction Award for Excellence in International Reporting and as a Finalist for the Livingston Award for Young Journalists. He has also received journalism fellowships from the Knight Foundation, the East-West Center, and the National Press Foundation. Josh holds a BA in international affairs from the George Washington University and studied at Sophia University in Tokyo, Japan. He lives in Washington, DC with his wife Ali Rogin of the PBS NewsHour and their daughter Anne.

**Abstract:**

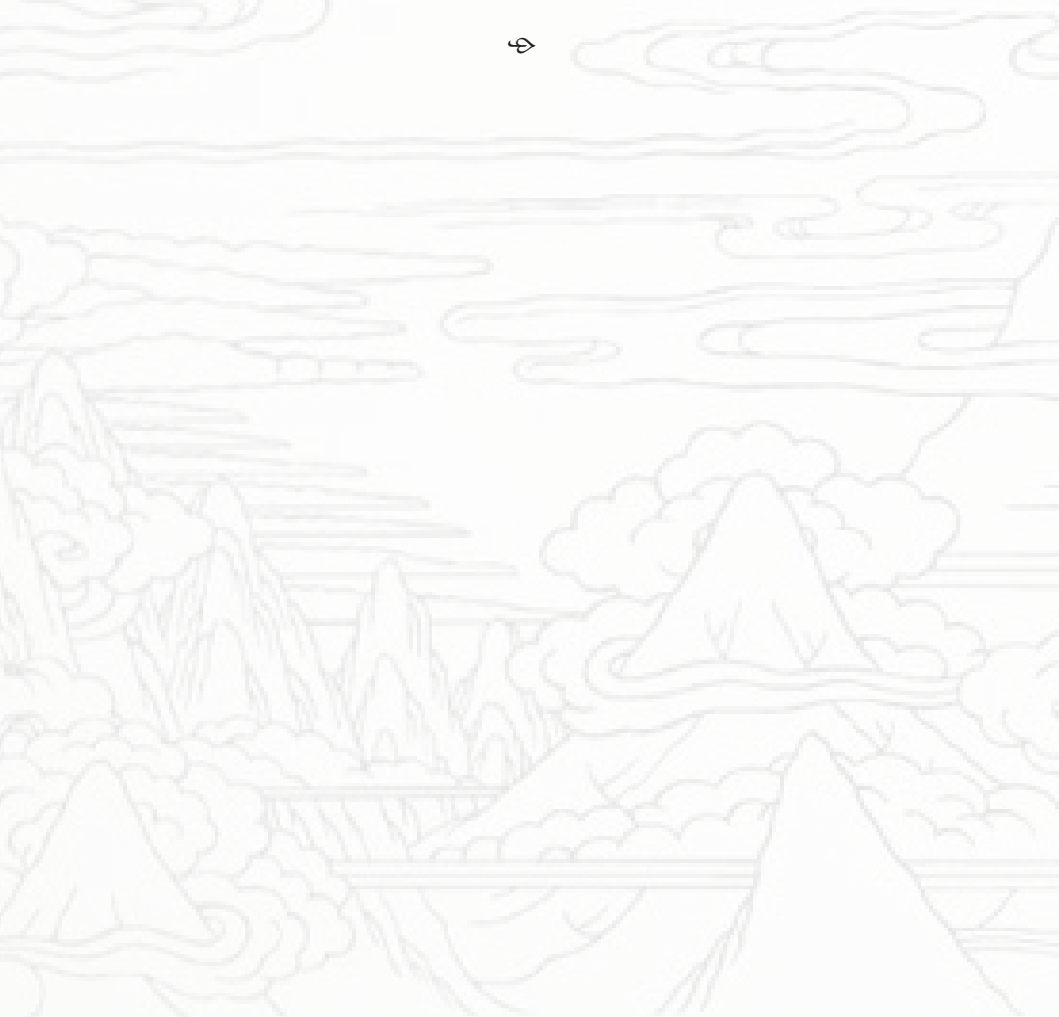
China has recently heightened the integration of the One China Principle in their foreign policy objectives. It constantly urges countries like the US, India, the EU and others to reaffirm their commitment to the One China Principle. However, there is often an erroneous overlap of the One China Principle and the One China Policy, as the two concepts have completely different meanings and scope. With Beijing seeking to push its preferences over the discourse on 'One China', it becomes impediment to understand how the 'Beijing's narrative' gradually takes form with limited international resistance. This work intends to build upon the question of how translation of the concept in the case of One China Principle/Policy with careful manoeuvring from Beijing adds to China's sense of legitimacy and its diplomatic muscle. The research will also discuss the question over defining and redefining the borders of this One China, including not just Taiwan but Tibet, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia and the South China Sea. Within the realm of international relations, China intends to elevate its One China Principle to the level of normative discourse. This is of particular relevance to Europe that has a value-laden foreign policy. This research will therefore take the EU's changing relations with China as a case study in order to interrogate China's own global ambitions as a normative power, the EU's engagement with this changing role and potential sites of resistance to this narrative.

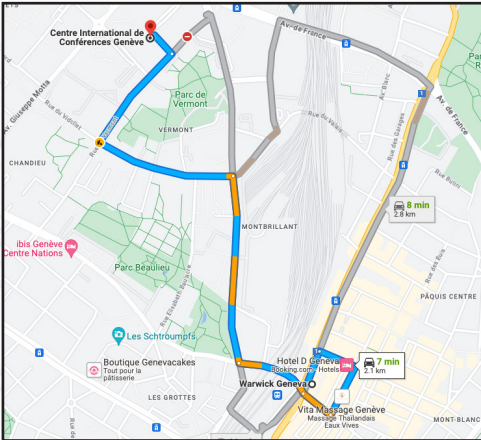


**Dr. Tenzin Lhadon** was born and raised in Dharamsala, India. She was educated at Tibetan Children's Village (TCV) school and went on to pursue her bachelor's and master's degrees from Chennai. Later she joined Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi as a PhD student in the Centre for East Asian Studies.

She completed her Ph.D. under the supervision of Prof. Srikanth Kondapalli and successfully defended her Ph.D. thesis in July 2021. She is currently a Research Fellow at the Tibet Policy Institute (TPI), Dharamsala and her work focuses on Tibet, China's relations with the US and EU, and Human Rights. She was also on the editorial team of




Tibet Policy Journal, an in-house publication of the TPI, and a regular contributor to the Journal. She has previously worked at the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies as a Research Officer focusing on the relations between China-Tibet-India. She has published chapters in edited Volumes and presented papers at various national and international academic conferences. She has also published various commentaries and has frequently been featured as an expert panelist by various news outlets. She was also elected as the executive member of the International Seminar of Young Tibetologists.





## MAP

Hotel Warwick to  
Centre International de  
Conférences Genève  
(Forum Venue)

	Warwick Hotel to Forum Venue	25 Mins
	Gare Cornavin to Collège Sismondi	10 Mins
	Cornavin to Vermont	15 Mins

\*Hotel will provide ticket for free public transportation during your stay, which will be shared in due course.

**25 OCTOBER 2023**

WELCOME DINNER: Timing: 18:30h | Venue: Hotel Warwick

**26 OCTOBER 2023**

LUNCH: Geneva Forum Venue

DINNER: Coupon enclosed in the Conference Kit | Venue: Les Brasseurs

(Kindly call the restaurant to reserve a table in advance)

**27 OCTOBER 2023**

LUNCH: Geneva Forum Venue

FAREWELL DINNER: Timing: 18:30h | Venue: Hotel Warwick

**EMERGENCY CONTACTS**

Ms Tenzin Choesang: + 41 779579308

Ms Karma Choekyi: + 41 764245933

Ms Tsering Youdon Marsen: + 41 764171992

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