



GENEVA FORUM 2026

FEBRUARY 9-10



REPRESSION AND RESILIENCE: HUMAN RIGHTS IN TIBET AND REGIONS UNDER CHINA



DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION
& INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

THE TIBET BUREAU, GENEVA

CENTRAL TIBETAN ADMINISTRATION
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GENEVA FORUM 2026

REPRESSION AND RESILIENCE: HUMAN RIGHTS IN TIBET AND REGIONS UNDER CHINA

International Conference Centre Geneva (CICG),
Switzerland

9 - 10 February 2026



Department of Information
& International Relations

The Tibet Bureau, Geneva

Central Tibetan Administration
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2026

**SIXTH GENEVA FORUM
9 – 10 FEBRUARY 2026**

- Theme** Repression and Resilience: Human Rights in Tibet and Regions under China
- Participants** UN Special Procedures mandate Holders; Human rights researchers and advocates; victims and defenders, diplomats and civil societies, scholars and policy makers
- Date & Venue** 9 – 10 February 2026 CICG, Rue de Varembe 17, 1202 Genève
- Organizer** The Tibet Bureau, Geneva
- Contact** Ph: +41 227387940 | Email: info@tibetoffice.ch or genevaforum@tibetoffice.ch

Introduction:

The human rights situation in regions under the People’s Republic of China (PRC) has been the subject of sustained concern by United Nations Special Procedures, treaty bodies, and other international human rights mechanisms. Over time, these concerns have intensified, particularly in relation to restrictions on civil, political, cultural, religious, economic, and social rights. Recent developments indicate a narrowing of civic space, increased securitization, and the growing use of legal, administrative, and technological measures that affect fundamental freedoms of Tibetans, Uyghurs, and other Turkic Muslims, Mongolians, Hong Kongers and others in regions under China.

At the same time, PRC has taken a more assertive role in challenging established international human rights norms and accountability mechanisms, including within the United Nations system. In this context, there is an urgent need for platforms that facilitate constructive, evidence-based dialogue grounded in international

human rights law, while amplifying the findings of UN mechanisms and the lived experiences of affected communities.

The Geneva Forum was conceived in the context of China's third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), with the first edition held on 2 November 2018. Following strong engagement and positive feedback, the Forum expanded into a two-day format to allow for more comprehensive examination of thematic human rights concerns.

Since 2018, successive editions of the Geneva Forum have contributed to evidence-based analysis of human rights conditions in Tibet and other regions under Chinese administration, drawing on documentation by UN mandate holders, treaty bodies, independent experts, academics, and civil society organizations.

The Forum has evolved into a unique platform bringing together human rights experts, defenders, academics, diplomats, governments, think tanks, civil society actors, and representatives of affected communities. It enables collective assessment of human rights conditions of Tibetans, Uyghurs, Hong Kongers, democracy advocates and human rights defenders in regions under China, while fostering dialogue on international cooperation, accountability, and protection.

Central Theme for the Sixth Geneva Forum - 2026

The Sixth Geneva Forum 2026 will deliberate on the theme titled "Repression and Resilience: Human Rights in Tibet and Regions under China." The Forum will provide an evidence based deliberative platform to examine patterns of human rights restrictions alongside the resilience of individuals and communities who seek to preserve their cultural, religious, linguistic, and social identities through peaceful and rights-based means.

Human rights concern in regions under PRC's governance has been raised repeatedly by UN Special Rapporteurs, Working Groups, treaty bodies, and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Tibet has been assessed by several international indices as

among the least free regions globally. Reports have raised concerns regarding large-scale placement of Tibetan children in state-run residential boarding schools, with implications for cultural rights, linguistic rights, and family life. Allegations of mass detention forced labour, and coercive labour transfer programmes in Tibet and of Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims continue to attract scrutiny under international human rights and labour standards.

Against this backdrop, the Forum will examine both structural patterns of rights restrictions and community-level resilience, situating discussions within the framework of international human rights treaties to which China is a party, as well as standards articulated through Special Procedures. Following China's fourth Universal Periodic Review (UPR) cycle (January–February 2024), the Forum will also review key recommendations, assess implementation challenges, and explore avenues for constructive international engagement and accountability.

Thematic Panels:

1. Uncovering Violations: Human Rights Review of Regions under China
2. Examining State Narratives: Development and Dispossession
3. Breaking the Silence: Surveillance, Censorship, and Transnational Repression
4. What Next?: Advancing International Accountability and Multilateral Responses

Special Panels:

1. The Roof of the World at Risk: Environmental Exploitation and Displacement in Tibet
2. Sacred Choice, Legal Right: Building Global Understanding of “Reincarnation”

Thematic Panels

Panel I: “Uncovering Violations: Human Rights Review of Regions under China” will examine the overall human rights situation of Tibetans, Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims, Hong Kongers including democracy advocates and human rights defenders in regions under China. Experts will assess ongoing rights concerns, sharing documented patterns of repression targeting cultural, religious, and political freedoms. Personal and community stories of resilience will be highlighted to illustrate lived experiences. Together, the discussion will offer a comprehensive understanding of human rights conditions under Chinese governance.

Panel II: “Examining State Narratives: Development and Dispossession,” examines how state-led development, shaped by colonial and internal-colonial logics, legitimises land dispossession, displacement, and socio-environmental transformation. It critically interrogates narratives of “development” and “progress” as tools of governance that obscure unequal power relations and material harms.

Panel III: “Breaking the Silence: Surveillance, Censorship, and Transnational Repression” will discuss the impact of state surveillance, information control, and censorship on individuals and communities within and beyond China. The session will address digital monitoring systems, restrictions on free expression, and mechanisms of suppressing dissent. Transnational repression—ranging from intimidation to coercion—will also be examined. The panel will emphasize the need for international awareness and protective measures for those targeted.

Panel IV: “What Next?: Advancing International Accountability and Multilateral Responses” will explore how international institutions, UN Mechanisms, states, and civil society actors can respond more effectively to human rights abuses. Discussions will include legal mechanisms, targeted sanctions, diplomatic engagement, and multilateral strategies. Panelists will examine challenges to building coordinated international responses

amid geopolitical constraints. The session will highlight the importance of sustained global advocacy in promoting accountability and protecting affected communities.

Special Panels

The first special session “**The Roof of the World at Risk: Environmental Exploitation and Displacement in Tibet**” examines the environmental consequences of large-scale development, resource extraction, and infrastructure projects on the Tibetan Plateau. The panel analyses how state-led environmental governance and extractive practices contribute to ecological degradation and the displacement of Tibetan communities, reshaping livelihoods, land use, and human–environment relations.

This second special panel on “**Sacred Choice, Legal Right: Building Global Understanding of ‘Reincarnation’**” will explore reincarnation as both a spiritual tradition and a matter of individual freedom protected under international human rights law. It will examine how reincarnation-related practices intersect with religious freedom, cultural rights, and self-determination. The session will address cases of political interference and highlight relevant UN mechanisms and treaty frameworks.

Expected Outcomes of 2026 Geneva Forum

The Geneva Forum aims to strengthen cooperation among organizations and experts engaging with UN Special Procedures, treaty bodies, and the Universal Periodic Review on issues related to human rights and freedom of religion or belief in China. It seeks to support evidence-based advocacy, enhance follow-up to UN recommendations, and contribute to informed international dialogue and media coverage on human rights conditions in regions under Chinese governance.

FORUM SCHEDULE

**Venue: International Conference Centre Geneva (CICG),
Switzerland | 9 - 10 February 2026**

Welcome: 8 February 2026

19:00 – 21:00 Welcome Dinner to all Speakers and Invited Guests

Day One: Monday, 9 February 2026

09:30 - 10:30 **Inaugural Session** with CTA President & Dignitaries

10:30 - 10:55 Networking Coffee/Tea

11:00 - 13:00 **Panel Session- 1: Uncovering Violations:
Human Rights Review of Regions under
China**

Chairperson: **Mr. Karma Choeying**, *Secretary, Department of
Information and International Relations (DIIR), Central Tibetan Administration
(CTA)*

Speakers:

Mr. Fang Xiangui (Christian), *Chinese Human Rights Lawyer, UK*

Mr. Johnny Fok, *Barrister-at-law, Hong Kong*

Mr. Lee Chung Lun, *China Programme Officer China, International Service
for Human Rights (ISHR), Geneva, Switzerland*

Dr. Tenzin Desal, *Senior Fellow, Tibet Policy Institute, CTA*

Ms. Zumretay Arkin, *Vice President, World Uyghur Congress, Munich,
Germany*

13:00 - 14:00 Lunch Break

14:00 - 15:30 **Panel Session- 2: Examining State Narratives:
Development and Dispossession**

Speakers:

Dr. Dawa Lokyitsang, *Tibetan Anthropologist and Research Fellow, International Institute for Asian Studies, Leiden University, Netherlands*

Dr. Jia Luo (Gyal Lo), *Educational Sociologist and Author*

Dr. Martin Hála, *Founder and Director, Sinopsis, Czech Republic*

Dr. Sophie Richardson, *Co-Executive Director, Network of Chinese Human Rights Defenders and China Advisor, Climate Rights International*

15:30 - 15:55 Coffee/Tea Break

16:00 – 17:30 **Special Panel 1: The Roof of the World
at Risk: Environmental Exploitation and
Displacement in Tibet**

Chairperson: **Ms. Mercè Monje Cano**, *Secretary General, Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO)*

Speakers:

Prof. Jaganath Panda, *Head, Stockholm Center for South Asian and Indo-Pacific Affairs, Institute for Security and Development Policy, Sweden*

Dr. Ute Wallenbock, *Research Associate, Department of Mongolian and Tibetan Studies, University of Bonn, Germany*

Dr. Tsewang Dorjee Jeshong, *Research Fellow, Tibet Policy Institute, CTA, Dharamshala, India*

Day Two: Tuesday, 10 February 2026

09:30 - 11:00 **Panel Session- 3: Breaking the Silence: Surveillance, Censorship, and Transnational Repression**

Chairperson: **Tsering Yangkey**, *Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Office of Tibet-London*

Speakers:

Dr. Mareike Ohlberg, *Author and Senior Fellow, Indo-Pacific Program, German Marshall Fund*

Prof. Ralph Weber, *Vice Director, Institute for European Global Studies, University of Basel and Research Councilor, Swiss National Science Foundation*

Ms. Tenzin Choekyi, *Senior Researcher, Tibet Watch*

Ms. Youshih Liao, *Assistant Professor of Diplomacy and International Relations, Tamkang University, Taipei, Taiwan*

11:00 – 11:25 Networking Coffee/Tea

11:30 - 13:00 **Special Panel: 2: Sacred Choice, Legal Rights: Building Global Understanding of Reincarnation**

Chairperson: **Ms. Kateřina Procházková**, *Journalist, Sinopsis Czech Republic*

Speakers:

Ms. Kate Saunders, *Author, Tibet Specialist and co-founder of Turquoise Roof*

Prof. Cameron Warner, *Associate Professor, Aarhus University and Chair, Leadership and Reincarnation of the Dalai Lamas Research Network*

Mr. Alexandr Neuman (Sashan), *Author and Former Personal Secretary of Czechoslovakia's and Czech Republic's first President Mr. Vaclav Havel*

13:00 - 14:00 Lunch Break

14:00 – 15:30 **Panel Session- 4: What Next? Advancing International Accountability and Multilateral Response**

Chairperson: **Ms. Thinlay Chukki**, *Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the Tibet Bureau, Geneva*

Speakers:

Dr. Bill Hayton, *Author, Editor of Asian Affairs and Associate Fellow, Asia-Pacific Program, Chatham House*

Dr. Maria Bancas Larriva, *Former Diplomat, Mexican Foreign Service and international Relations Professional and Researcher (East Asia Focus)*

Prof. Nicholas Levrat, *UN Special Rapporteur for Minority Issues and Professor of International Relations and European Law*

Dr. Tenzin Dorjee, *Adjunct Assistant Professor of Political Science, Columbia University and Senior Researcher and Strategist, Tibet Action Institute*

Ms. Uzra Zeya, *President and CEO, Human Rights First (HRF) and former US Special coordinator for Tibetan Issues*

15:30 - 15:55 Coffee/Tea Break

16:00 – 17:00 **Closing Program** with CTA President and Dignitaries

19:00 – 21:00 Farewell Dinner (Restaurant details will be shared later)

Thematic Panel 1

Uncovering Violations: Human Rights Review of Regions under China

The Fourth Universal Periodic Review of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) underscored grave and persistent concerns regarding human rights conditions across regions administered by the PRC, including violations faced by Tibetans, Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims, Hongkongers and democracy advocates and human rights defenders in China. The review documented widespread restrictions on freedom of expression, religion, movement, and association; arbitrary detention and torture; the erosion of cultural and linguistic rights in ethnic minority regions; and the growing reliance on national security and counterterrorism frameworks to suppress peaceful dissent. Despite repeated recommendations by member states calling for the release of arbitrarily detained individuals, an end to forced assimilation, forced labor, family separation, and discriminatory national security laws, serious human rights abuses persist in Tibet and other regions under PRC rule.

Coercive governance has increasingly been institutionalized through state-led labor and security policies against Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims. A December 2025 report by Uyghur Rights Monitor documents how the Xinjiang Aid program operates not merely as a development initiative, but as a mechanism of coerced labor and cultural transformation. Through a pairing assistance system, cadres, capital, and industries are embedded in Uyghur-majority areas, while Uyghur workers are uprooted and dispersed across China through state-imposed labor transfers framed as “employment” and “poverty alleviation.” These practices result in forced displacement, family separation, and systematic assimilation, effectively transforming the region into a “labor export hub.”

Religious repression in Uyghur regions remains among the most severe globally, driven by intensified enforcement of the policy of “sinicization of religion,” which subordinates belief and practice to Party ideology. Uyghur Muslims continue to face imprisonment

for routine religious activities alongside pervasive surveillance and intimidation. Similar patterns are evident in Tibet, where Tibetan Buddhism is subject to expanding state interference through restrictions on monastic life, religious education, and expressions of devotion.

The revised Regulations on the Management of Tibetan Buddhist Temples, in force since January 2025, further institutionalize political control over Tibetan Buddhism by mandating ideological compliance, political education, and administrative oversight of religious study and movement. These measures have intensified mass expulsions, surveillance, and population caps at major monastic institutions such as Larung Gar, the demolition of religious structures in areas including Drakgo, and the targeting of senior religious figures, reinforcing a broader strategy of cultural and religious assimilation.

Religious repression in mainland China follows the same coercive logic. Authorities continue to target unregistered Protestant house churches through raids and arrests, detaining clergy and congregants on vague charges such as “fraud” and “subversion.” The long-standing campaign against Falun Gong has also intensified, marked by coordinated mass arrests based on pre-compiled lists and disproportionately targeting elderly practitioners and women. These practices reflect a nationwide pattern of criminalizing religious belief outside state-sanctioned institutions.

Enforced disappearance and arbitrary detention remain central tools of repression in “Inner Mongolia,” particularly against activists, writers, educators, students, and herders opposing assimilation policies. Prominent cases include the prolonged disappearance of veteran rights advocate Hada following years of extrajudicial detention, alongside the disappearance or death under surveillance of dissidents such as Huuchinhuu and the unresolved detention of indigenous activist Sodmongol. These practices escalated following the 2020 protests against language policy reforms, during which thousands were reportedly arrested, placed under house arrest, or disappeared for defending their linguistic rights.

In Hong Kong, national security laws have been used to dismantle political opposition, civil society, and independent media, marking a profound erosion of the “One Country, Two Systems” framework. Since the imposition of the National Security Law in 2020, Beijing’s expansive concept of national security has been embedded into Hong Kong’s legal system, enabling the exclusion of pro-democracy figures from elections, the criminalization of peaceful protest, and the prosecution of dissent through both local and mainland jurisdictions. By 2025, hundreds of individuals had been arrested under national security charges, including 47 pro-democracy activists convicted of subversion in 2024, with average sentences exceeding five years.

High-profile cases such as that of media publisher Jimmy Lai, who spent nearly three years in pre-trial detention and now faces the possibility of life imprisonment on fabricated charges of foreign collusion, underscore the targeting of press freedom. The passage of the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance in March 2024 further expanded offenses and penalties following limited public consultation, while the establishment of a national security hotline, mass arrests, and the disbanding of civil society and religious organizations have entrenched a climate of surveillance, self-censorship, and repression that continues to unfold.

In Dege County in eastern Tibet, monks and villagers opposing a hydropower dam that threatens monasteries, villages, and sacred sites were subjected to mass detentions following peaceful protests in early 2024, with senior monks from Yena Monastery later sentenced in June 2025 on vague charges such as “disturbing social order,” alongside reports of torture in custody. More recently, in Kashi village in Sershul County, Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Tibetan residents were arrested in November 2025 following the discovery of an illegal gold-mining operation after raising concerns about environmental damage and the absence of community consultation, and subsequent security operations that involved door-to-door arrests, enforced disappearances, and a communications blackout.

The repression of Tibetans is further reinforced by an expanding legal architecture that embeds ideological conformity into law, exemplified

by the draft Law on Promoting Ethnic Unity and Progress submitted to the National People's Congress in September 2025. Framed as advancing unity and development, such legislation legitimizes political re-education, mandates the promotion of Mandarin, and enables state intervention in language use, education, and cultural expression, thereby suppressing distinct ethnic and religious identities. Similar misuse of vague and expansive legal provisions is evident in Uyghur Region, where national security, counterterrorism, passport, and exit and entry laws are routinely invoked to justify mass surveillance, arbitrary detention, and severe restrictions on Uyghurs' freedom of movement. Under broadly defined concepts such as threats to "national security" or "national interests," Uyghurs face discriminatory passport confiscations, travel bans, collective punishment of family members, and constant monitoring, in clear violation of international human rights norms, including the right to leave and return to one's own country.

Reports emerging from regions across China substantiate the findings of the Fourth Universal Periodic Review and underscore the consequences of China's rejection of key recommendations. Far from demonstrating equality or inclusion, state policies pursue the systematic assimilation of ethnic populations into a Han-centric national identity while sustaining structural discrimination. Large-scale development and security initiatives imposed without meaningful participation further entrench marginalization, surveillance, and displacement, serving state and corporate interests rather than affected communities. By persecuting individuals and communities for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, religion, movement, assembly, press, and association, the PRC violates its commitments to the international community, including its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the protections guaranteed under its own Constitution.

Speakers' Biographies:



Mr. Fang Xiangui (Christian), is a Chinese human rights lawyer, has represented several FoRB and politically sensitive cases, he was the defence lawyer of the New Civil Movement and White Paper movement. He is also the overseas contact of Chinese Human Rights Lawyer Group (CHRLG), 709 Crackdown Victim, he sixth batch signees of the Charter 08 and also a member of the Union of Chinese Nationalists (中國藍聯盟)



Mr. Johnny Fok (Ka Chi Fok) is a barrister-at-law in Hong Kong and an advocate for democracy in Hong Kong. He served as a voluntary lawyer in the 2014 umbrella movement in Hong Kong (2014 Hong Kong Protests), as well as a voluntary lawyer in the 2019 Protests in Hong Kong. He personally also joined the protest in 2019 in Hong Kong.

He is also one of the 19 wanted persons of the Hong Kong Government under the notorious National Security Law in Hong Kong, because of his overseas activities in relation to democracy, namely, being a founding member of the Hong Kong Parliament and being a member of the Hong Kong Parliament Election Organizing Committee (HKPEOC), of which, the election of the 1st Hong Kong Parliament was duly held in the year 2025.



Mr. Lee Chung Lun is China Programme Officer at the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR). He works on advancing international accountability for human rights violations in China and supporting human rights defenders from China, Hong Kong, Tibet, and the Uyghur

region in their engagement with United Nations human rights mechanisms. He has previously worked on election observation, democratic governance, and human rights advocacy across Asia.



Dr. Tenzin Desal is an anthropologist of Tibet and the Himalayas. He is currently the Senior Research Fellow of the Tibet Policy Institute. He edits the in-house annual English Journal. He is also the editor of a special issue of the TPI Journal, titled *Foregrounding Tibet*. He has written on issues related to center-periphery relations between Tibet and China. He is also an elected member to the board of advisors of the International Seminar of Young Tibetologists.



Ms. Zumretay Arkin is the Vice President of the World Uyghur Congress. She leads WUC's international advocacy efforts, engaging with multilateral institutions, governments and various stakeholders. She regularly engages at the UN Human Rights Council, where she raises China's violations of international Covenants and treaties. In 2021, leading up to the Beijing Winter Olympics, she was one of the key activists leading the #NoBeijing2022 campaign, leading to the boycott of the games by 11 governments.

She is also the spokesperson at the World Uyghur Congress. She fluently speaks Uyghur, French and English, and offers commentary to international media outlets. She has a Bachelor of International Relations from the University of Montreal, and a Bachelor of Law (LL.B) from the University Laval. She was awarded the Freedom of Worship Award by the Roosevelt Foundation, in April 2024.

Chairperson:



Mr. Karma Choeying was born in Ladakh in 1974. He went to the Tibetan Children’s Village School in Ladakh and later completed his higher secondary schooling from the Tibetan Children’s Village School in Dharamsala, India in 1992. He then joined Delhi University and graduated in 1995 with Bachelor’s degree in Commerce.

In 1996, he joined the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) as Under Secretary and was first posted at the Dikyiling Tibetan settlement as office secretary. Since then, he served in various Tibetan settlements in India as Co-operative Secretary and Settlement officer. Mr. Choeying joined the University of San Francisco in 2007 for one-year under graduate course in Public Administration under the Tibetan Scholarship Program of the US State Department.

He also served as the Executive Secretary of the Bureau of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, New Delhi on two occasions in 2010 and 2019. Besides, he served as the Executive Secretary at the Office of Tibet, Brussels for four years from 2012 to 2015 and as the Additional Secretary for the Department of Home, CTA for nearly three years from 2016 to 2019. Currently, he is the Secretary of the Department of Information and International Relations of the CTA.

Thematic Panel 2

Examining State Narratives: Development and Dispossession

Introduction: Development as a Strategy of Legitimation

Beijing's official discourse on Tibet represents a calculated political project: the deliberate replacement of universal human dignity with state-led infrastructure as the primary measure of legitimacy. By elevating economic indicators, connectivity, and construction metrics above fundamental human rights, the Chinese government seeks not only to justify its decades-long rule in Tibet but also to reshape international norms around governance and accountability.

Framed through the language of “modernisation,” “poverty alleviation,” and “peaceful liberation,” state narratives present China's presence in Tibet as both benevolent and historically necessary. Yet this veneer of progress obscures a violent history of occupation, systemic repression, and the denial of Tibetans' political, cultural, and religious rights. Development, in this context, is not neutral—it is mobilized as a tool to normalize domination and silence scrutiny.

The panel deliberations challenge the premise that economic growth can excuse or compensate for the suspension of sovereignty, self-determination, and fundamental freedoms. Such a logic, if accepted, would establish a dangerous global precedent: that perceived underdevelopment constitutes a mandate for external control. The international community has consistently rejected this expansionist reasoning, recognizing that to do otherwise would undermine international stability and the rule-based order.

Colonial and Internal-Colonial Logics of Development

Development policies in Tibet and other regions under Chinese governance reflect what many scholars and human rights experts identify as **internal colonialism**. In this model, a dominant political centre asserts control over peripheral territories by restructuring economies, governing land and resources, and reshaping social and

cultural life according to state-defined priorities.

Tibet is consistently portrayed in official discourse as incapable of self-directed progress—“backward,” “isolated,” or environmentally mismanaged—thereby justifying intrusive state intervention. This paternalistic framing mirrors classic colonial narratives in which local societies are rendered passive objects of development rather than active agents of their own futures.

Such narratives erase Tibetan political history, governance traditions, and reform efforts, replacing them with a singular state-authored storyline in which development flows unilaterally from Beijing to the plateau. Resistance to this model is reframed as irrational, separatist, or hostile to progress, enabling coercive governance to be justified as stability maintenance.

A Case for Tibetan Agency: Challenging Paternalistic Myth

The claim that Tibetans lack the capacity for self-driven development is not only inaccurate—it is a foundational myth used to legitimise domination. Historical records demonstrate that Tibetan leaders actively pursued reform and modernisation long before Chinese intervention. The 13th Dalai Lama, Thubten Gyatso, initiated sweeping institutional reforms in the early twentieth century, including the establishment of Tibet’s first postal system in 1913, the introduction of a modern currency, the founding of the first English-language school in 1923, and the construction of the first hydroelectric power station in 1924. These efforts reflected a conscious engagement with global modernity on Tibetan terms.

Similarly, the 14th Dalai Lama articulated a strong commitment to social and political reform prior to exile. In exile, this vision has been realised through the establishment of a democratic governance system, culminating in his voluntary devolvement of political authority in 2011 in favour of an elected leadership. This transition stands as powerful evidence of Tibetan capacity for democratic self-governance and institutional development.

The systematic exclusion of these histories from official discourse is itself a form of dispossession—one that denies Tibetans their political subjectivity and reinforces the colonial fiction that development can only occur through external control.

The Mirage of Progress: Infrastructure as Control

By 2026, state-led infrastructure development—extensive roads, railways, urban projects, and full power grid connectivity—is frequently presented as proof of progress. However, reports from 2025–2026 indicate that much of this infrastructure serves dual civilian–military purposes, facilitating troop deployment, population surveillance, and “securitization” of the plateau. Development thus functions as an architecture of control rather than empowerment. Material expansion has not increased Tibetan freedom or agency; instead, it deepens dependence on the state and consolidates Beijing’s strategic grip.

Urbanization, resettlement programs, environmental zoning, and educational policies further disrupt communities, severing ties to ancestral territories and traditional ways of life, while boarding schools and labor programs advance assimilationist objectives. Development becomes a form of social engineering, eroding cultural diversity in the name of progress.

International human rights law offers a counterweight to these colonial narratives, affirming that development must be participatory, non-discriminatory, and culturally respectful. Advocacy must challenge frameworks that normalize structural injustice, rejecting infrastructure-as-legitimacy narratives and centering affected communities’ voices. Despite extensive constraints, Tibetans continue to assert agency through cultural preservation, environmental stewardship, documentation, and international advocacy, contesting the state’s monopoly over development narratives. A fundamental shift is required: development should be defined by the people it is meant to serve, not as a tool for domination, and international actors must confront the colonial logics embedded in current models.

Selected References:

- UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Human Rights Concerns in the People's Republic of China
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- UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Concluding Observations on China
- UN Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights, Thematic Reports on Minority and Cultural Rights in China
- Human Rights Watch, China's Forced Relocation of Rural Tibetans
- International Commission of Jurists, The Question of Tibet and the Rule of Law
- Center for Strategic and International Studies, China's gray-zone infrastructure strategy: Tibetan Plateau roads, dams, and digital domination

Speakers' Biographies:



Dr. Dawa Lokyitsang is a Tibetan anthropologist and Research Fellow at Leiden University's International Institute for Asian Studies. She studies Chinese settler colonialism in Tibet, Tibetan anticolonial resistance, and refugee agency in cultural revitalization and transnational advocacy. She co-founded and edits *Lhakar Diaries*, a digital platform that amplifies Tibetan voices on displacement, environmental degradation, and state-led development, highlighting human rights violations, community resilience, and decolonial strategies, while linking Tibetan struggles to broader Indigenous and environmental movements globally.



Born in Tibet, **Dr. Gyal Lo** completed his early education in his home region before earning a master's degree in Tibetan Language and Culture from Northwest Minzu University in Lanzhou, China. In 1995, he was appointed Assistant Professor in the same department, where he taught for a decade and conducted extensive research on Tibetan education.

Dr. Gyal Lo later pursued a Master of Education and a PhD in the Sociology of Education at the University of Toronto. Upon returning to China, he was denied reemployment at his former institution due to political sensitivities related to his Western academic training. From 2017 to 2020, he served as Full Professor at the Institute for Studies in Education at Yunnan Normal University.

In 2020, amid an increasingly authoritarian political environment, Dr. Gyal Lo's five-year contract was terminated on the grounds that he was a "foreign Tibetan" with a Western background and therefore considered a potential political risk. He left China on December 31, 2020, and has chosen not to return due to the dangers associated with conducting

independent research on Tibetan education and society.

Dr. Gyal Lo now focuses on alerting the international community to the severe threats facing Tibetan society, particularly the survival of its language, religion, and culture. He is the author of *Social Structuration in Tibetan Society: Education, Society, and Spirituality* (Lexington Books, 2016).



Dr. Martin Hala (Ph.D.) is the founder and director of *sinopsis.cz*, a China-focused research project based in Prague, Czech Republic. He is also a researcher and lecturer at the Department of Chinese Studies at Charles University in Prague. Educated in Prague, Shanghai, Berkeley and Harvard, he has taught at universities in Prague, Bratislava and Lisbon, and led projects in several countries in Asia.



Dr. Sophie Richardson is co-Executive Director of Chinese Human Rights Defenders, and senior China advisor to Climate Rights International. In 2024 she was a Visiting Scholar at Stanford University's Center for Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law, where she researched democracies' support for human rights in China. From 2006-2023 she served as the China Director at Human Rights Watch, overseeing the organization's research and advocacy on Chinese government human rights abuses inside and outside the country.

She has worked closely with civil society groups, governments, and United Nations bodies, and serves on the boards of several organizations. Dr. Richardson has testified to the Canadian Parliament, European Parliament, and the United States Senate and House of Representatives.

She is the author of *China, Cambodia, and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence* (Columbia University Press, Dec. 2009), an in-depth examination of China's foreign policy since 1954's Geneva Conference, including rare interviews with Chinese policy makers. She speaks Mandarin, and received her doctorate from the University of Virginia, certificate from the Johns Hopkins University-Nanjing University Center for Sino-American Relations, and her BA from Oberlin College.

Thematic Panel 3

Breaking the Silence: Surveillance, Censorship, and Transnational Repression

China has constructed an unprecedented surveillance infrastructure in Tibet that represents one of the most sophisticated digital systems of social control in the contemporary world. This apparatus combines real-time sensor technologies, drones, remote sensing, GPS tracking, sophisticated data-mining systems, and artificial intelligence capabilities including facial recognition, voice analysis, and comprehensive DNA databases of the Tibetan population. The system operates through state-mandated mechanisms such as the Great Firewall, Golden Shield, and strategic internet shutdowns, while extending surveillance through ubiquitous mobile applications like WeChat and Alipay that function as direct pipelines to government databases.

This surveillance regime is significantly more intrusive in Tibet than in other regions of China, building upon traditional security apparatuses of military, police, and neighborhood informants with cutting-edge technologies specifically developed and tested in Tibetan areas. The extensive measures currently deployed against Uyghurs were previously refined in Tibet under Chen Quanguo's leadership as Party Secretary of the "Tibet Autonomous Region" before his transfer to Uyghur region.

China ranks among the world's worst offenders in internet freedom, with Freedom House consistently labeling it as having the "least free" digital environment. Unlike temporary outages in other countries, China's shutdowns are systematic, opaque, and often indefinite, serving as cornerstones of authoritarian governance that demonstrate how technological expansion deepens Tibet's entanglement in political repression rather than liberating it.

The historical development of mass surveillance in China traces back to Mao's era following the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949, when control mechanisms encompassed the entire

nation through word-of-mouth dissemination during the Cultural Revolution. Cities were divided into socialist work units where local informants reported on neighbors' behaviors, fostering communal self-policing that has since been replicated in Tibet. China's current surveillance capabilities have evolved to target and amass personal information for leverage over important actors while gathering big data with essentially unlimited applications. The government has deployed these data-gathering systems globally with minimal transparency or accountability, positioning China as a frontrunner in global surveillance that reinforces Communist Party control while endangering dissidents and activists worldwide and strengthening undemocratic regimes.

The surveillance system in Tibet operates as comprehensive digital colonization where control over data translates directly to control over people. High-tech surveillance cameras monitor Buddhist monasteries around the clock, while monks are forced to install monitoring applications on their mobile phones enabling police to track contacts and conversations, leading to pervasive self-censorship. Advanced border surveillance employs drones and unmanned aerial vehicles extensively, tightening governmental control over Tibet and neighboring regions. Surveillance extends beyond China's borders through transnational repression, with Tibetan pilgrims in Nepal reporting prohibitions on visiting monasteries led by exiled lamas and practicing self-censorship near sacred sites due to fears of being reported through facial recognition, mobile tracking, and online monitoring.

China's censorship regime in Tibet functions as systematic cultural annihilation, erasing Tibetan identity through algorithmic suppression of language, history, and religious expression. The state blocks all references to the Dalai Lama, the 1959 Uprising, self-immolations, and peaceful resistance, effectively severing Tibetans from their heritage while rewriting collective memory. Real-time monitoring detects Tibetan-language keywords automatically, triggering immediate content deletion and user detention.

Vague charges of "splittism" weaponize self-censorship, forcing Tibetans to police every communication under threat of arbitrary

imprisonment. This information blackout extends globally through the Great Firewall, isolating Tibet from international solidarity while concealing ongoing atrocities from external documentation. The regime's digital erasure enables systematic human rights violations to proceed invisibly, preventing evidence collection, silencing witnesses, and ensuring impunity through enforced invisibility.

China's surveillance apparatus and censorship mechanisms function as systematic social engineering designed to reshape societal dynamics by instilling an environment of constant observation that systematically dismantles traditional trust and solidarity within communities. This strategy deliberately fosters deep suspicion among neighbors, friends, and family members, progressively isolating individuals and rendering them increasingly vulnerable to state control.

The resulting environment of distrust is designed to become internalized by the population, normalizing surveillance as an accepted part of everyday life while neutralizing dissent and establishing absolute obedience as the new standard. This Orwellian regime perfected in Tibet represents a direct threat to global human rights, data privacy, and democratic norms that demand decisive, coordinated international action.

The escalating scope and sophistication of this surveillance system necessitate critical examination of implications for human rights and democratic standards, requiring immediate cessation of technological abuses and commitment to transparency, data protection, and adherence to international human rights standards. The international community must not only condemn China's intrusive surveillance of Tibetan people but also address attempts to export such surveillance models globally, as the Chinese Communist Party continues systematic high-tech human rights violations against Tibetans, Uyghurs, Mongolians, and Hong Kong residents under its rule.

China's transnational repression is ubiquitous. The Chinese Communist Party has systematically targeted Tibetans, Uyghurs, Taiwanese, Chinese dissidents, and Falun Gong practitioners living outside China-controlled territories in an effort to extend its control

and influence over these communities.

Since 2008, Chinese authorities have completely severed people-to-people relationships between Tibetans inside and outside Tibet. China has deliberately intensified its monitoring and intimidation of Tibetan diaspora communities, especially those who are active participants in the global Tibetan freedom movement.

According to Freedom House studies, transnational repression is defined as when “governments reach across national borders to silence dissent among their diaspora and exile communities.” The Chinese government has officially tasked the United Front Work Department with managing, monitoring, silencing, and suppressing Tibetan narratives and political activism in the global political arena. It also works to prevent political mobilization and campaigns against Chinese atrocities in Tibet and advocacy for Tibetan freedom.

The Xi Jinping-led Communist Party of China has always considered Tibet a core sovereignty issue. China views Tibetan Buddhist culture and its global recognition as a potential threat to building China’s global image and achieving cultural dominance.

Through its “wolf warrior” global diplomacy, China and its agencies have portrayed Tibetan activists and freedom defenders as separatists or foreign agents. Chinese embassies and consulates thoroughly monitor and scrutinize Tibetan communities, individuals, and organizations abroad. These so-called wolf warrior agents are especially tasked with closely monitoring Tibetan activists whose family members and relatives live in Tibet. Using pressure tactics such as detaining family members, denying cross-border contact, interrogating and blackmailing relatives in Tibet, Chinese officials abroad have been intimidating and harassing Tibetan activists to cease their activism and political lobbying.

The PRC’s transnational aggressions systematically violate international law and order. It is high time to deliver justice to those who have suffered and been tortured under Chinese transnational repression and its unilateral global interventions.

Speakers' Biographies:



Dr. Bonnie Yushih Liao is an Assistant Professor of Diplomacy and International Relations at Tamkang University. Her research examines how authoritarian governance in the Indo-Pacific employs legal, administrative, and discursive tools to restrict the enjoyment of fundamental rights across societies and borders. Her work focuses on patterns of surveillance, narrative control, and psychological pressure, and their transnational effects on communities and civil society.

She has published extensively on freedom of religion or belief, with particular attention to Buddhism, and on the interaction between religious institutions, state power, and international conflict. Her research engages international human rights law, UN Special Procedures, and questions of accountability and protection for affected populations. Dr. Liao regularly contributes to international academic and policy forums, and publishes and speaks in Chinese, English, and Japanese



Dr. Mareike Ohlberg is a senior fellow in the Indo-Pacific Program at the German Marshall Fund. She is based at GMF's Berlin Office. Before joining GMF, Mareike worked as an analyst at the Mercator Institute for China Studies. Prior to that, she was an An Wang postdoctoral fellow at Harvard University's Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies and a postdoctoral fellow at Shih-Hsin University in Taipei. She is co-author of the book *Hidden Hand: How the Communist Party of China is Reshaping the World* (2020).

Mareike has a doctoral degree in Chinese studies from the University

of Heidelberg and a master's degree in East Asian regional studies from Columbia University. She is a frequent commentator in the media on the global implications of China's rise.



Prof. Ralph Weber holds a PhD in Political Science from the University of St. Gallen and currently is a professor for European Global Studies at the University of Basel, Switzerland. He is the Vice-Director of the Institute for European Global Studies and serves as a research councilor with the Swiss National Science Foundation. He specializes on transgressive political activities of the Chinese Party-State abroad, particularly united front work, propaganda and intelligence.

He was given a mandate by the Swiss Government in 2022 to write a research report on the transnational repression of the Tibetan and Uyghur communities in Switzerland. The report (co-authored with Shrey Kapoor, Selina Morell, and Barbara von Rütte) was published by the Federal Council in February 2025.

on human rights, transnational repression, and international response.



Ms. Tenzin Choekyi is a Senior Researcher at Tibet Watch, a research group founded in 2006 to monitor human rights conditions in Tibet. She is a trilingual researcher and translator with a background in environmental science, and has experience translating for stateless Tibetans, refugees, and government bodies. Working with a team of multilingual Tibetans, Tibet Watch combines translation, open-source intelligence (OSINT), and in-depth interviews to document Tibetan experiences

of surveillance and Chinese policies. Tenzin regularly provides background and commentary to journalists covering Tibet, and has testified before the Canadian Parliament, the United Nations, and the European Union.

Chairperson:



Mrs. Tsering Yangkey was born and raised as a Tibetan refugee in India. She completed her early education at the Central School for Tibetans in her village, and later earned a Bachelor's degree from Christ College in Bangalore. Driven by her commitment to the Tibetan political cause, she joined the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) in Dharamsala in 1995. Prior to her appointment in November 2024 as the Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the CTA in the United Kingdom, she served in various departments, including the Department of Religion and Culture, Department of Health, Department of Information and International Relations, Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts, Tibet Policy Institute, and the Public Service Commission.

Thematic Panel 4

What Next?: Advancing International Accountability and Multilateral Responses

Tibet is experiencing cultural genocide. With a Global Freedom Score of 0 out of 100 from Freedom House in 2025, the situation in Tibet demands immediate international intervention. Chinese authorities are systematically destroying Tibetan identity through enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention, religious repression, and the forced admission of nearly a million Tibetan children into colonial-style boarding schools designed to erase their language and culture. Since 1950, China's occupation has methodically dismantled Tibetan cultural, religious, and linguistic identity through accelerating Sinicization policies, environmental destruction, and direct interference in sacred religious traditions and practices.

The situation in Tibet is not an isolated case but part of a broader pattern of governance in the People's Republic of China marked by mass surveillance, forced assimilation, arbitrary detention, and the suppression of religious, cultural, and linguistic identity. The international community can no longer treat this as a peripheral of human rights concern—it requires urgent and coordinated action now.

However, encouraging signs of renewed international attention have emerged in recent years. In October 2024, 15 UN member states including Australia, Canada, Japan, the UK, and US delivered a historic joint statement at the UN General Assembly expressing concern about Tibet and Uyghur region—the first comprehensive statement since 1965. The challenge now is translating this concern into effective, coordinated action despite China's expanding economic influence and diplomatic reach.

Strengthening UN Mechanisms

The UN system offers multiple accountability pathways. During China's January 2024 Universal Periodic Review, it rejected nearly 70% of the 23 Tibet-specific recommendations from 21 member

states and listed the remainder as ‘accepted and already implemented’, clearly contradicting the reality in Tibet, as has been stated many times by independent UN human rights experts. It is imperative that countries must build stronger coalitions to present unified, actionable recommendations while documenting China’s refusal patterns. The 15-country coalition should expand and move from statements to resolutions establishing formal monitoring mechanisms through the Human Rights Council. Requesting comprehensive reports from the High Commissioner will create official documentation of violations.

UN special procedures offer crucial leverage for accountability. In recent years, UN special rapporteurs and human rights experts have issued communications on cultural rights, religious freedom, Tibetan children in state-run boarding schools, restrictions on movement, arbitrary detentions, and demolition of religious institutions.

These policies mirror approaches deployed in other regions of China, including the Uyghur Region and Inner Mongolia, where state-led assimilation, language suppression, and intrusive security measures have been justified under the same national security and “ethnic unity” frameworks.

In June 2020, around 50 UN independent experts and from 30 UN Special Procedure Mandate Holders have called on the United Nations Human Rights Council to “act with a sense of urgency to take all appropriate measures to monitor Chinese human rights practices.” Their call to the Human Rights Council and Member States for a special session on China, establishment of impartial and independent United Nations mechanism to monitor, analyze and report on human rights situation in China remains unanswered.

Most recently, thirteen UN experts raised concerns about the Medog Dam’s threat of irreversible destruction. Thematic rapporteurs including on religious freedom, civil, economic and cultural rights, and human rights defenders should intensify efforts through joint communications and formal requests for country visits. This sustained pressure, even when denied, creates an official record of China’s obstruction and maintains essential international focus on the situation.

Alternative Accountability Mechanisms

Since China's Security Council veto blocks traditional UN sanctions, alternative mechanisms become essential. The European Parliament's May 2025 resolution called for EU sanctions on officials and entities responsible for violations. The EU should continue using its Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime alongside coordinated designations with the US, Canada, UK, and Australia, focusing on officials overseeing forced boarding schools, religious persecution, and transnational repression.

Democratic nations should pursue universal jurisdiction laws to investigate and prosecute officials responsible for crimes against humanity. Expanding Magnitsky-style legislation to sanction individuals implementing forced assimilation, religious persecution, and arbitrary detention creates individual accountability where state-level pressure fails. Additional approaches include ad hoc or people's tribunals to document violations, national courts using universal jurisdiction, and corporate accountability through supply chain due diligence laws.

An international independent investigative mechanism, like those for Syria or Myanmar, would provide systematic documentation through evidence collection, refugee interviews, and case files for potential future prosecution. Despite China's rejection of independent oversight in Tibet, the international community must maintain pressure for an investigative mechanism that serves critical purposes: it keeps international attention focused on the situation, signals that the global community will not simply accept assurances at face value, and establishes a clear standard for what transparency should look like.

Institutionalizing Diplomatic Coordination

Integrating Tibet more systematically into national China strategies—rather than treating it as a siloed issue—will strengthen coherence across human rights, trade, climate, and security policy. The October 2024 joint statement coalition should form a “Friends of Tibet” or

“Contact Group” at the UN with regular ministerial-level meetings to coordinate strategies. Expanding this coalition geographically is crucial—engaging Latin American, African, and Asian democracies by framing Tibet within broader concerns about cultural genocide, human rights, and climate issues like dam projects and glacier protection.

The Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act (RATA) in the United States provides a model for coordinated adoption across multiple jurisdictions, denying Chinese officials access to democratic nations while they restrict access to Tibet. Parliamentary networks, particularly the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China, should expand focus on Tibet while national resolutions create domestic constituencies sustaining pressure on executive branches.

Documentation and Information Systems

Effective accountability requires robust monitoring. The closure of Radio Free Asia’s Tibetan service removed a crucial documentation source that US State Department reports relied upon. It has become even more imperative for governments and foundations to invest in independent monitoring organizations, exile media, satellite imagery analysis of forced relocations and monastery demolitions, and systematic databases of victims and perpetrators. This documentation provides evidence for future accountability mechanisms, counters Chinese propaganda, and prevents claims of ignorance.

Concrete Policy Leverage

International actors must demand unfettered access to Tibet for diplomats, parliamentarians, UN experts, journalists, and NGOs, making access to a precondition for trade negotiations and high-level visits. Access should include verifying the wellbeing of the disappeared Panchen Lama. Trade and investment policies offer leverage—connecting benefits to human rights improvements, screening supply chains for forced labor, and conditioning development financing on environmental and cultural impact assessments. Forced labor bans applied to Uyghur region should extend to Tibetan regions.

Multilateral bodies should develop mechanisms protecting religious succession integrity, explicitly rejecting Chinese interference in recognizing the next Dalai Lama through coordinated statements and diplomatic non-recognition of any Chinese-appointed candidate.

Empowering Civil Society

International accountability proves most effective when empowering affected communities. Sustained funding for Tibetan civil society organizations, documentation projects, language preservation initiatives, and diaspora communities strengthens long-term resilience. Governments should provide secure technology for information flow from Tibet and protect the diaspora from transnational repression. International platforms must create structured opportunities for Tibetan representatives to directly engage UN bodies and parliamentary committees.

Overcoming Obstacles

Three major obstacles require strategic responses: First, since China can block action at the UN Security Council, efforts must focus instead on the Human Rights Council, General Assembly votes, and regional groups. Second, because China uses its economic power to silence criticism, countries need to reduce their economic dependence through diverse trade partnerships and work together so that China's retaliation becomes too costly. Third, since Tibet often gets overlooked, advocates should connect it to wider concerns about China's human rights record, authoritarian governance, peoples' rights, and climate change—issues that already have international attention.

Success depends on coordination among like-minded democracies, creative use of existing legal frameworks, persistent documentation preventing normalization, and recognition that accountability requires long-term patience and adaptability. No single measure will reverse decades of occupation, but comprehensive approaches combining legal mechanisms, economic leverage, diplomatic coordination, and civil society support can raise costs for ongoing violations and create

pathways for future accountability. The international community's credibility doesn't come from how well it condemns human rights violations—it comes from taking action together. Words must turn into real commitments: building institutions that protect Tibetans and ensuring they have the right to preserve their culture and choose their own future.

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Speakers' Biographies:



Prof. Nicolas Levrat is the fourth UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues, appointed in October 2023. A French-speaking Swiss born in 1964, he is himself a member of a linguistic minority. His academic work focuses on peoples' and minority rights, federalism, and legal systems. Levrat has been Professor of International and European Law at the University of Geneva since 2001, where he founded the Global Studies Institute (2013) and served as Director of the International Law Department (2016-2019).

He began his career at the Council of Europe (1991-1994) and later taught at Université libre de Bruxelles. He has authored or edited 27 books, published over 150 articles, and advised governments and international organizations for 30 years. Prior to his UN appointment, he served as Vice-President of the Council of Europe's Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the protection of national minorities.



Dr. Bill Hayton is the author of *The Invention of China* (Yale, 2020) and three other books on Asia: *Vietnam: rising dragon* (Yale 2010 & 2020), *The South China Sea: the struggle for power in Asia* (Yale, 2014) and *A Brief History of Vietnam* (Tuttle, 2022). He is the editor of the academic journal *Asian Affairs* and was appointed an Associate Fellow with the Asia-Pacific programme at Chatham House in 2015. Bill worked as a BBC journalist for 22 years, including a year as the BBC's reporter in Vietnam in 2006-7 and another year seconded to the public broadcaster in Myanmar in 2013-14.

In 2019 he received his PhD from the University of Cambridge for work on the history and development of the South China Sea disputes. He is a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. He is currently working on a new book on East Asian history.



Dr. Maria Blancas is an international relations professional with twelve years of research experience. She studied her Bachelor's degree in International Relations at Tecnologico de Monterrey in Mexico City, holds a Master's degree in International Security from the University of Westminster and a PhD in Chinese Studies from King's College London. She has worked in the public sector within the Mexican Foreign Service (diplomatic and consular branch) and with foreign embassies in Mexico.

In the private sector, she has worked mainly as a trade and economics advisor. Her research focuses on international relations issues related to sanctions, trade, foreign policy, human rights, and security. Her research primarily centers on the Asia-Pacific region, particularly the Korean Peninsula, Japan, China, Taiwan, and Tibet. Currently, she is working as an independent researcher.



Dr. Tenzin (Tendor) Dorjee is Senior Researcher and Strategist at Tibet Action Institute. His work has been published by Foreign Affairs, Oxford Encyclopedia of Politics and Religion, Journal of Democracy, Washington Post, Council on Foreign Relations, and the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict. He received his Ph.D. and M.A. in political science from Columbia University and his B.A. in international relations from Brown University.



Ms. Uzra Zeya joined Human Rights First (HRF) as President and CEO in April 2025. In this role, she leads HRF efforts to advance human rights for all, defend democracy at home and abroad, uphold the rule of law, and protect vulnerable populations fleeing oppression. As U.S. Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights from July 2021 to January 2025, she led global U.S. diplomacy to advance human rights, strengthen rule of law, support refugees, elevate the fight against corruption, and combat transnational crime and human trafficking from 2021-25.

Concurrently, she was U.S. special coordinator for Tibetan issues, rallying international partners to support Tibetans' human rights and preserve their unique identity. As president and CEO of the Alliance for Peacebuilding, she led a non-partisan network of 150+ organizations working on peaceful conflict resolution in 180+ countries. Her distinguished diplomatic career included senior roles at U.S. embassies in France and India, the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, and advising Secretaries of State Rice and Clinton. She also served in Syria, Egypt, Oman, and Jamaica, and speaks French, Arabic, and Spanish.

Zeya co-authored a 2021 Council on Foreign Relations report that shaped State Department modernization. She is on the University of Notre Dame Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies Board of Advisors. She was awarded the French Legion d'Honneur and the Cross of Commander of the Order of the Lithuanian Grand Duke Gediminas in recognition of her contributions to a more just and peaceful world.

Chairperson:



Ms. Thinlay Chukki is the Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) for Central and Eastern Europe at the Tibet Bureau, Geneva. She previously served as the Special Appointee for Human Rights at the Bureau (2019–2021) and as a researcher at the UN, EU, and Human Rights Desk of the CTA in Dharamshala.

Ms. Chukki is a recipient of the prestigious Tibetan Scholarship Program—equivalent to the Fulbright Scholarship—administered by the U.S. Congress, through which she earned her Master of Laws (LL.M.) degree from Harvard Law School in 2018. She also holds an LL.M. in Business Laws from the National Law School of India University (2012), and a Bachelor of Laws (LL.B.) degree with distinction from SDM Law College, Mangalore University, where she was awarded multiple gold medals for academic excellence. Prior to her work with the CTA, she led the Legal Department (South India) at Tata Motors Ltd. for nearly five years.

Fluent in multiple languages, Ms. Chukki has also had the distinct honor of serving as a Kannada-language translator for His Holiness the Dalai Lama on several occasions since 2009. Born and raised as a Tibetan refugee in South India, Ms. Chukki’s life has been deeply shaped by her heritage. Her father served as a personal security guard to His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Tibet before fleeing into exile in 1959, while her mother, then only eight years old, escaped with her family. Though her parents were not formally literate, they placed profound emphasis on the value of learning. As Ms. Chukki often reflects, “I never describe my parents as uneducated, because to me, education is far more than mere literacy. It’s about the values you live by and the grit you carry—and my parents had those in abundance.” With her diverse professional background and deep commitment to justice and human rights, Ms. Chukki continues to be a powerful advocate for the Tibetan cause on the global stage.

Special Panel 1

Endangering the Roof of the World: Environmental Exploitation and Displacement in Tibet

Tibet, often referred to as the “Roof of the World,” encompasses the Tibetan Plateau, the highest and one of the most ecologically sensitive regions on Earth. Averaging over 4,500 meters above sea level, the plateau functions as the water tower of Asia, giving rise to major river systems such as the Indus, Brahmaputra, Mekong, Yangtze, and Yellow Rivers etc. These rivers sustain ecosystems and livelihoods across Asia, making Tibet central to regional and global ecological stability.

Beyond its hydrological importance, the Tibetan Plateau also plays a crucial role in regulating Asian atmospheric circulation, Asian summer monsoon patterns, and carbon storage through its vast grasslands and permafrost zones. These ecosystems are fragile and highly sensitive to climatic and human-induced disturbances. For centuries, Tibetan nomadic pastoralism evolved in close balance with this environment. Seasonal mobility, communal land management, and traditional ecological knowledge helped maintain grassland health, biodiversity, and water retention.

For Tibetans, land is inseparable from culture, spirituality, and identity. Mountains, rivers, and grasslands are understood as living entities, protected through religious ethics and customary practices. However, since China’s occupation of Tibet, Tibet has increasingly been redefined by China as a strategic frontier and a source of natural resources. This shift has laid the foundation for large-scale environmental interventions that prioritize state-led development over nomadic land relations.

China’s Concept of Ecological Civilization and Green Energy

China promotes the concept of “ecological civilization” as a guiding framework for balancing economic growth with environmental

protection. In official discourse, Tibet is portrayed as a critical ecological security barrier and a key site for conservation, renewable energy, and climate mitigation. While these objectives appear environmentally progressive, their implementation in Tibet has relied on top-down governance models that marginalize Tibetan communities and fundamentally alter human–environment relations.

Forceful Removal of Tibetan Nomads and Land-Use Change

One of the most significant policy interventions has been the large-scale relocation of Tibetan nomads under programs labelled as “ecological migration,” “grassland protection,” and “poverty alleviation.” Nomadic herders are removed from ancestral grazing lands and resettled into permanent housing settlements, often far from viable livelihoods. These policies are justified by claims that pastoralism causes grassland degradation, despite evidence that traditional grazing systems historically maintained ecological balance.

The removal of nomads represents a profound transformation of land-use patterns. Communal rangelands are fragmented through fencing, converted into conservation zones, or opened for infrastructure and extractive projects. This disrupts long-standing relationships between people and land, erodes traditional environmental knowledge, and weakens ecological resilience. Sedentarisation has also resulted in food insecurity, loss of livestock-based economies, and social disintegration among resettled communities.

Hydropower Development

Tibet has also become a central pillar of China’s renewable energy strategy, particularly through large-scale hydropower development. The plateau’s fast-flowing rivers and steep terrain are promoted as ideal for clean energy production. Major dam projects, including proposed mega-dams on the Yarlung Tsangpo, are framed as contributions to carbon reduction and national energy security.

However, hydropower development in Tibet carries severe ecological and social risks. Dams alter river flows, disrupt sediment transport,

threaten biodiversity, and increase the risk of landslides and seismic activity in an already geologically unstable region. Sacred rivers and landscapes are transformed into industrial energy corridors, undermining Tibetan cultural and spiritual connections to the environment. Moreover, downstream impacts raise serious concerns for transboundary water security across South and Southeast Asia.

Resource Extraction and Mining

Alongside conservation and green energy initiatives, Tibet has experienced expanding mineral extraction, including lithium, copper, gold, and rare earth elements—materials critical for global renewable energy technologies. Mining operations have led to water contamination, toxic waste accumulation, and irreversible land degradation, particularly in high-altitude ecosystems where recovery is extremely slow.

This coexistence of conservation rhetoric and intensive extraction exposes a central contradiction in China's ecological civilization model in Tibet. Environmental governance selectively protects landscapes while simultaneously enabling industrial exploitation, with Tibetan communities bearing the ecological and social costs.

Implications

The cumulative impact of forceful resettlement, hydropower expansion, and mining has resulted in widespread displacement across Tibet. Displacement is not limited to physical relocation; it encompasses cultural, economic, and psychological loss. Resettled Tibetans often face unemployment, dependency on state subsidies, erosion of language and cultural practices, and exclusion from meaningful participation in environmental decision-making.

Environmental displacement has also weakened Tibetan nomads' traditional stewardship of the land. By removing communities most intimately connected to the land, current policies risk accelerating ecological degradation rather than preventing it. Grasslands left unmanaged or subjected to inappropriate state interventions often

show declining biodiversity and increased vulnerability to climate change.

At a broader level, Tibet illustrates the dangers of pursuing climate and conservation goals through authoritarian, centralized models. When environmental protection is detached from human rights and Indigenous participation, it can become a tool of political control rather than ecological sustainability. In Tibet, environmental policy functions not only as a development strategy but also as a mechanism for territorial consolidation and social transformation.

Conclusion

The environmental crisis unfolding on the Roof of the World is inseparable from questions of governance, justice, and displacement. China's implementation of ecological civilization and green energy policies in Tibet has transformed landscapes while systematically displacing Tibetan communities and undermining Indigenous environmental relations. Protecting Tibet's fragile ecosystems requires approaches that recognize Tibetan land rights, respect traditional ecological knowledge, and prioritize participatory, rights-based environmental governance. Without this shift, conservation and green development risk becoming instruments of exploitation rather than solutions to the ecological challenges facing the plateau.

Speakers' Biographies:



Dr. Jagannath Panda is the Head of the Stockholm Center for South Asian and Indo-Pacific Affairs (SCSA-IPA) at the Institute for Security and Development Policy (ISDP), Sweden. Dr. Panda is a Senior Fellow at The Hague Center for Strategic Studies in the Netherlands. As a senior expert on East Asia and Indo-Pacific affairs, Prof. Panda has testified to the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission at the US Congress on 'China and South Asia'.

He is the Series Editor for Routledge Studies on Think Asia. Dr. Panda is named as one of the Strategic Affairs Thinkers of the Next Decade by The Print, and is named as one of the top experts in Global Affairs and Diplomacy from Sweden by Petelgo.



Dr. Ute Wallenböck is currently a research associate at the Department of Mongolian and Tibetan Studies at the University of Bonn, Germany. Following her doctoral studies at the University of Vienna, Austria, she contributed to the EU-funded 'Sinophone Borderlands' project at Palacký University Olomouc and worked in the Department of Chinese Studies at Masaryk University in Brno, both in the Czech Republic.

She is the author of numerous articles on Tibet and Inner Asia, focusing on religion and identity, foodways and cultural heritage, historical as well as contemporary Sino-borderland dynamics, and climate and development policies. Her work combines ethnographic, historical, and socio-political analysis, with particular attention to Tibet, Himalayan geopolitics, and China's regional strategies.



Dr. Tsewang Dorji Jeshong is a Research Fellow at the Tibet Policy Institute, specializing in Tibet–Himalaya relations, China’s border infrastructure in Tibet, geopolitical strategy, regional security, and Human Rights and historical studies of Tibet. He holds a doctorate from the University of Madras and is widely recognized for his expertise in Himalayan geopolitics and Tibetan studies.

His research focuses on critical strategic issues including China’s transboundary water governance, territorial disputes, and China’s expanding influence across the Himalayan region and South Asia. Dr. Jeshong has published extensively in national and international journals and policy forums, addressing topics such as China’s border infrastructure development and strategic thinking over Tibet, historical Tibet–Monyul relations, and China’s “Palm and Five Fingers” strategy. He is a valued contributor to Tibetan and Indian think tanks, and scholarly dialogues on Tibetan affairs and Himalayan security.

Chairperson:



Ms. Mercè Monje Cano is Secretary-General of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), an international membership-based organisation representing communities that are not represented at the United Nations and other major international decision-making spaces. She leads UNPO’s work to strengthen member advocacy, expand strategic partnerships, and amplify unrepresented voices in multilateral forums, with a focus on rights-based approaches that link human rights, cultural identity, and sustainable development.

With over 15 years of experience in international advocacy, programme leadership, coalition-building, and strategic communications, Mercè has supported diverse communities facing political exclusion, civic space restrictions, and structural discrimination. Her work highlights the close connection between self-determination and the fundamental rights of Peoples, including the protection of land and environmental rights—recognising that control over territory, natural resources, and development choices is often central to safeguarding livelihoods, identity, and long-term community resilience.

Special Panel 2

Sacred Choice, Legal Rights: Building Global Understanding of Reincarnation

Reincarnation is a spiritual tradition that carries profound cultural, social, and political significance across many communities. Beyond its religious meaning, it intersects with individual autonomy, cultural continuity, and human rights, making it a subject of both personal and collective concern. Understanding reincarnation in secular, accessible terms allows participants from diverse backgrounds to appreciate its tangible implications for personal freedoms, governance, and international relations, without requiring prior religious knowledge.

At the heart of these practices are questions of religious freedom, cultural rights, and self-determination. International human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, protect freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. Recognizing reincarnation as a matter of legal and cultural protection emphasizes that spiritual practices are not merely symbolic but carry real-world consequences for community participation, succession processes, and social cohesion.

Reincarnation practices are not isolated from political and geopolitical realities. The succession of prominent spiritual leaders, such as the Dalai Lama, illustrates how deeply spiritual traditions can intersect with state interests and international diplomacy. When governments attempt to influence or control these processes, spiritual practices become contested sites of power, highlighting the tension between individual and community autonomy and state authority. Such interventions have broader implications for cultural preservation, regional stability, and global perceptions of human rights.

Legal frameworks and international mechanisms offer important avenues for safeguarding reincarnation-related rights. Bodies such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Human Rights Council provide guidance to uphold religious and cultural freedoms, enforce accountability, and protect communities from political interference. Understanding these instruments in practice helps illustrate the ways secular legal systems can interact with spiritual traditions to protect individual and collective rights.

Ultimately, the protection of reincarnation practices is not solely a religious or cultural concern but a matter of human dignity, autonomy, and self-determination. Historical precedent, field-based observation, and legal analysis show that safeguarding these traditions requires attention to social, political, and legal dimensions alike. Appreciating reincarnation in this holistic way highlights the complex interplay between spirituality, law, and geopolitics, and underscores the importance of protecting cultural continuity while respecting individual freedom.

The government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) has wrongfully asserted three principal conditions for the recognition of the 15th Dalai Lama. Each of these claims directly contravenes the explicit authority vested in His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, contradicts centuries-old Buddhist traditions and represents a fundamental violation of religious freedom.

The PRC government claims that the search for the 15th Dalai Lama must be confined to areas within the borders of the PRC. His Holiness the Dalai Lama unequivocally stated in his September 2011 declaration: "The person who reincarnates has sole legitimate authority over where and how he or she takes rebirth and how that reincarnation is to be recognized." This declaration establishes beyond dispute that the predecessor alone determines the location of rebirth—not any political entity, regardless of its territorial claims.

In Tibetan Buddhism, reincarnation is not a political appointment, but a profound spiritual phenomenon rooted in karma, merit, and the voluntary choice of enlightened beings. The primary purpose of reincarnation is to continue a predecessor's unfinished work serving Dharma and beings and perpetuate their legacy. The recognition process involves authentic spiritual methods including the reincarnation's reliably recounting his previous life; identifying possessions belonging to the predecessor; divinations from reliable spiritual masters, predictions of mundane oracles, and observing visions in sacred lakes of protectors.

On 2 July 2025, during the occasion of his 90th birthday celebrations and following extensive consultations with eminent religious leaders—as well as in response to earnest appeals from a large number of devotees and well-wishers from across the world—His Holiness formally reaffirmed his statement of 2011 and solemnly declared: “I am affirming that the institution of the Dalai Lama will continue.” Furthermore, His Holiness emphasized that the exclusive authority to identify and recognize his reincarnation rests solely with the Gaden Phodrang Trust, which shall undertake this responsibility in consultation with the traditional spiritual authorities of Tibetan Buddhism, including the heads of all Buddhist traditions and the oath-bound Dharma Protectors inseparably linked with the Dalai Lama lineage. His Holiness categorically stated that the PRC government has no right whatsoever to interfere in this matter.

The PRC government mandates that the “Golden Urn” method must be employed as the ultimate and definitive procedure for recognizing the reincarnation of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. However, the historical record categorically refutes the legitimacy and necessity of the Golden Urn method for recognizing the Dalai Lama's reincarnation. The so-called “Golden Urn” method, imposed by Manchu China in 1792, cannot be considered an essential element of Tibetan Buddhist reincarnation recognition since the practice of identifying reincarnated lamas was established centuries earlier—beginning with the Karmapa lineage in the 13th

century and the establishment of the Dalai Lama institution in the 17th century—demonstrating that authentic spiritual recognition existed and functioned successfully for over 500 years before any Chinese governmental involvement.

Most significantly, neither the Thirteenth nor the Fourteenth Dalai Lama was selected using the “Golden Urn” method. The current 14th Dalai Lama was recognized in 1939 through traditional methods, with no Chinese involvement whatsoever. His Holiness’s 2011 declaration and 2025 reaffirmation establish that traditional spiritual methods—not politically imposed mechanisms like the Golden Urn—will govern the recognition process. The Gaden Phodrang Trust, in consultation with traditional spiritual authorities, will employ these time-honored Buddhist methods.

The PRC government asserts that its official approval is required for the legitimate recognition of the 15th Dalai Lama. The requirement of the PRC government approval represents a staggering contradiction and an illegitimate assertion of authority over a purely spiritual matter. The Chinese Communist Party’s Order No. 5 claims state authority over the recognition of all reincarnated lamas and Tulkus. This represents an explicitly atheist regime that rejects the very concept of past and future lives now presuming to control a spiritual process it philosophically denies. This is not a religious policy but a colonial strategy.

The Chinese authorities have openly declared they are waiting for the Dalai Lama’s death to recognize a “Fifteenth Dalai Lama of their choice,” a cynical plan aimed at installing a puppet figure to legitimize Chinese rule in Tibet. This is a clear attempt to undermine the authority of genuine Tibetan Buddhist tradition, deceive the international community, and eradicate Tibet’s unique cultural and spiritual heritage. No amount of political pressure, historical revisionism, or authoritarian decree can confer legitimacy upon a candidate imposed by a government that His Holiness has explicitly excluded from any role in the recognition process.

Speakers' Biographies:



Ms. Kate Saunders is a Tibet specialist and co-founder of Turquoise Roof, a project that combines Tibetan research expertise with open-source intelligence methods to deepen understanding of the situation in Tibet, currently working with Tibet Watch in the UK. With over 20 years of senior-level experience as a Tibet/China specialist, Kate formerly served as Research Director of the International Campaign for Tibet. Kate is the author of 'Eighteen Layers of Hell:

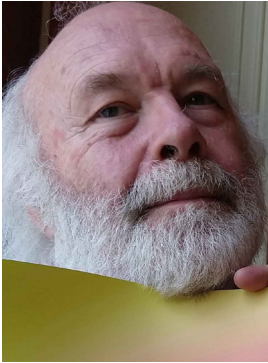
Stories from the Chinese Gulag', one of the few English-language works examining the Chinese laogai system, co-author of 'The Dalai Lama and Havel: Warriors for Truth and Love', and the report 'Sacred Authority and State Power: The Dalai Lama Institution in a global context', published in June 2025 by the Czech thinktank Sinopsis. Her articles and op-eds have appeared internationally in publications including The Guardian, The Times, the New York Times, The Independent and others.



Prof. Cameron Warner, Associate Professor, Aarhus University, and Chair of the Leadership and Reincarnation of the Dalai Lamas Research Network. He study two interrelated processes: the changes to Buddhism in the Himalayas (Tibet, Nepal, India, Bhutan) and the development of Nepal. His research has touched upon material culture, gender, migration, politics, and heritage preservation.

He also serves as the chairperson for the Leadership and Reincarnation of the Dalai Lamas Research Network (LEAD) funded by the Independent Research Fund Denmark. LEAD discusses the impact of the Dalai Lama's plans for his upcoming succession. He teaches

BA courses on the anthropology of the Himalayas, MA courses in the theory of anthropology and thesis writing, and PhD courses on planning fieldwork, analyzing data, and dissertation writing.



Mr. Alexandr Neuman is former secretary to President Vaclav Havel (1990-1994), author of the book *Dalailama Havel Prague 1990*, author of the epilog about modern Tibetan history in the Czech edition of Shakabpa's *History of Tibet*, member of His Holiness' retinue during His Holiness' visits to Czechoslovakia and Czech Republic (1990-2011). Graduated at Charles's University (Mgr., journalism). Mr. Neuman is journalist and books translator from English (*Tibetan Book of Dead*, *Tibetan Yoga*, *Nejang Yoga* and many more). Now he is retired.

Chairperson:



Ms. Kateřina Procházková is an analyst at Sinopsis in Prague. She previously worked as a foreign correspondent for Czech Television and Czech Radio in Asia. She lived in Asia for around ten years, in Hong Kong, Taipei, and Beijing. She studied journalism at the University of Ostrava and the University of Glasgow. She developed her language skills at the National Taiwan University (NTU) in Taipei, the Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU), and the Sophia University in Tokyo.

She is the co-author of the book *Havel and the Dalai Lama - Warriors for True & Love*, which has been published in Czech and an updated version in English (2025).

Organizer Reflections

The Sixth Geneva Forum takes place within an evolving and often challenging multilateral landscape, where the protection of human rights increasingly requires sustained attention, careful documentation, and principled engagement. Convened in Geneva, this Forum seeks to contribute to ongoing international conversations by providing a space for evidence-based dialogue grounded in international human rights law and informed by the lived experiences of affected communities.

The organizers extend their sincere appreciation to all speakers, moderators, participants, and guests who have contributed their time, expertise, and perspectives to this Forum. Particular gratitude is owed to UN mandate holders, researchers, civil society actors, and representatives of affected communities whose work and testimony continue to inform international understanding and accountability. Appreciation is also extended to readers of this background material, whose engagement, attention, and willingness to listen form an essential part of sustaining meaningful human rights discourse.

The 2026 Forum is convened in a year that also marks the 90th birthday of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama. For decades, His Holiness has articulated a vision grounded in nonviolence, dialogue, compassion, and universal responsibility—values that continue to resonate within international human rights frameworks and multilateral spaces. His life’s work serves as a reminder that resilience can take peaceful and principled forms, even in the face of prolonged adversity.

The Geneva Forum does not aim to offer definitive conclusions, but rather to support reflection, exchange, and continuity. By fostering dialogue across institutions, regions, and perspectives, it contributes to the longer process through which international norms are examined, defended, and renewed. It is in this spirit of shared responsibility and sustained engagement that the Sixth Geneva Forum is convened.

NEVER GIVE UP

“No matter what is going on
Never give up
Develop the heart
Too much energy in your country
Is spent developing the mind
Instead of the heart
Be compassionate
Not just to your friends
But to everyone
Be compassionate
Work for peace
In your heart and in the world
Work for peace
And I say again
Never give up
No matter what is going on around you
Never give up”

- *His Holiness the Great 14th Dalai Lama*

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