



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

China's new ethnic unity law Exchange of views with the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights

**Statement by the President of the International Campaign for Tibet
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Mr. Chair, Honorable Members of the European Parliament,

Thank you for inviting me to speak today.

I would first like to commend this Parliament for adopting last week a strong resolution on China's new Law on Promoting Ethnic Unity and Progress, sending a clear and timely signal to Beijing about Europe's concern.

This law, which will enter into force on July 1, represents a significant turning point and solidifies a more precarious and harsher future for the Tibetan people.

It reflects the codifying of forced assimilation policies under President Xi Jinping.

What is new today is the scale, the systematisation, and the legal codification of these policies.

Codification of cultural erasure

Several provisions of this law are particularly concerning. Article 15 says the state shall promote written and spoken Chinese and, even if a non-Chinese language is to be used, the state should "give priority to the national standard spoken and written Chinese language and script." Thus, Tibetan is placed in a subordinate position.

This has real consequences. Language is not only a medium of communication. It is the foundation of cultural identity. When a language is marginalised, the culture it carries is also at risk.

Today, over one million Tibetan children are enrolled in a system of boarding schools designed to assimilate Tibetan children linguistically, culturally and socially and indoctrinate them in Chinese Communist Party ideology.

This law provides is a blueprint for the Chinese government to pursue the erasure of the Tibetan language, culture and identity.

Transnational repression

Another deeply troubling provision is Article 63, which allows Chinese authorities to target individuals and organisations outside China for acts deemed to “undermine ethnic unity” or “create ethnic division”.

These terms are broad and open to interpretation, creating a legal basis for transnational repression, not only against Tibetans, but also against Uyghurs, Southern Mongolians, Hong Kongers, and Chinese dissidents and human rights defenders living outside China.

There are around 150,000 Tibetans living in exile worldwide. Tens of thousands live within the European Union, including in several Member States such as Belgium.

The freedoms enjoyed by a European citizen of Tibetan ethnicity could now be exposed to risks of arrest, arbitrary detention or ill-treatment if they travel to China or Tibet. My speaking here before you today could certainly be seen as contravening the Ethnic Unity Law, as could the presence of all of you in this room today.

This raises serious questions under international law. It also raises concerns about the sovereignty of European states.

Reports led by Members of this Parliament have highlighted how authoritarian governments seek to silence critics beyond their borders.

This law must also be seen alongside other policies affecting Tibetans.

These include large-scale forcible relocation of Tibetan nomadic communities which have transformed traditional ways of life, increasing restrictions on freedom of religion, with tighter state control over monasteries, religious education, and spiritual leadership, including in matters related to succession of Tibetan Buddhism leaders and in particular the succession of the Dalai Lama institution including the current 14th Dalai Lama.

Since 2009, more than 150 Tibetans have self-immolated in a desperate form of protest against restrictions on their fundamental freedoms and calling for the return of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, their beloved spiritual leader.

Numerous violations of China’s international and national human rights commitments

In April this year, eight independent UN human rights experts clearly expose and unmask the CCP’s intention to erode Tibet’s unique cultural, linguistic and religious heritage and assimilate Tibetans.

The experts emphasize the systematic way in which this law violates China’s own legal framework and its international obligations.

Tibet used as Testing Ground for the new Law

Tibet has been the testing ground for this new law. In 2010, a model Regulations on Ethnic Unity and Progress was enacted in the Dechen (Diqing) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan.

In January 2020 “Regulations on the Creation of a Model Region for National Unity and Progress in the Tibet Autonomous Region” was enacted in the Tibetan capital Lhasa.

Many of their provisions are found in the new law.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This law is not only about governance. It is about reshaping identity. It promotes a model of society that is homogeneous. It reduces space for pluralism and diversity.

The European Union knows well the value of cultural and linguistic diversity, and is founded on the principle of “unity in diversity”, where such diversity is seen not as threats, but as a strength.

From this perspective, the trajectory we in China is deeply concerning.

Honourable Members, allow me to conclude with a few recommendations for consideration.

First, we encourage the EU to adopt a clear and unified public statement denouncing this law and its implications for human rights on behalf of all 27 Member States.

Second, this issue should be placed on the agenda of all upcoming high-level engagements with China, including the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue, the High-Level Strategic Dialogue, and the EU-China Summit.

Third, we recommend appointing an EU Special Representative for Tibet in order to improve coordination of EU policies on Tibet.

Fourth, the EU should strengthen its response to transnational repression, building on the European Parliament’s recent work and recommendations in this area.

Fifth, we call on the EU to urge China to resume the Sino-Tibetan dialogue without preconditions. This dialogue remains essential to achieving a peaceful solution based on genuine autonomy for Tibetans. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama has now reached the age of 90, it is more important than ever to seize this opportunity for dialogue.

In conclusion, this law goes far beyond a simple domestic policy shift. It reflects a broader direction with profound implications for human rights, cultural diversity, and international norms.

It is essential that these concerns are addressed clearly, consistently, and collectively by the European Union and its Member States.

Thank you for your attention.

Tencho Gyatso