



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

Twentieth session

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

### **Written statement\* submitted by Reporters without Borders International - Reporters sans Frontières International, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[4 June 2012]

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\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

## **Suppression of freedom of information leads to strong isolation of the Tibet autonomous region**

The human rights situation in Tibet is worsening significantly since March 2008 widespread protests by Tibetan people against Chinese repressive policies and denial of basic human rights. Since February 2011, more than thirty self-immolators have died from their injuries.

The Chinese authorities' response to this crisis has been brutal suppression of any information regarding the situation in Tibet. Intellectuals, Tibetan artists, writers and human rights activists have been particularly targeted. Since 2008, over seventy writers, artists and intellectuals have been arrested or sentenced to imprisonment.

Although, fundamental rights provided by the Chinese Constitution include freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of procession, and of demonstration (Article 35) and freedom from unlawful detention or arrest (Article 36)", however, the Chinese authorities have been denying these rights to Tibetan people.

The following are a series of examples of the government crackdown in 2011 and in early 2012:

1. Ugyen Tenzin, a 25-year-old popular singer, has been detained, beaten, and rendered disabled by the Chinese authorities in Nangchen County of Yulshul prefecture, Qinghai Province, in February 2012 after he released an album titled "An Unending Flow of My Heart's Blood."
2. On Feb 15, Gangkye Drubpa Kyab, a 33 year-old popular author, was taken from his home in Seda County, Sichuan province, by a team of 20 Chinese policemen.
3. In early Feb 2012, Dawa Dorje, a popular advocate of Tibet's traditional culture and language disappeared at Lhasa's Gonggar Airport. He was returning from organizing a seminar on the subject in Sichuan's capital Chengdu. He had expressed grave concern over the closure of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in the prefecture's Driru County.
4. The writer Kalsang Tsultrim, was sentenced to four years' imprisonment on 30 December 2011. He had been held without charge since 16 December 2010. e had distributed a CD detailing the suffering of the Tibetan people and expressing concern about the disappearance of their religion and culture, as well as human rights abuses.
5. During a winter "Strike Hard" campaign in the Tibet Autonomous Region in 2011, more than 20 Tibetans were taken into custody for allegedly downloading songs, perceived as a threat by the Chinese authorities because they call for unity among Tibetans and about Tibetan culture, religion, and identity.
6. Sherab Gyatso, a writer and monk from Kirti monastery, disappeared on 16 March 2011 when Phuntsog, also from Kirti Monastery, self-immolated. It is believed that Gyatso has actually been released from Chengdu prison but is denied the right to travel outside of Chengdu.
7. On 2 June 2011, Tashi Rabten, writer and editor of banned literary journal, *Shar Dugri*, was sentenced to four years imprisonment for "separatist activities", for writing and publishing *Written in Blood*, a book about the 2008 uprisings in Tibet. On 30 December 2010, three other writers who worked with Tashi Rabten were sentenced to four years: Dhonkho and Buddha, while Kelsang Jinpa was sentenced to three years. All three were convicted of "incitement to split the nation."

8. On 5 July 2011, monk and writer Pema Rinchen was arrested for suspicion of inciting hatred among minorities and encouraging separatism. He had self-published a book titled *Look*, critical of Chinese policy. Pema Rinchen distributed the book to various places in Tibet.

9. Jolep Dawa, founder, editor, and writer of *Du-rab Kyi Nga*, a Tibetan magazine, was sentenced to three years in prison in October 2011. He was detained at the Jinchuan County Detention Centre for over a year before receiving his sentence. Many suspect that his arrest is related to his work Choepa Lugal, a writer for the National Publication in Gansu province was arrested on 19 October 2011. Meycheh was a writer of the banned literary magazine *Shar Dungri* and also wrote many articles and blogs.

10. On 19 March, on suspicion of passing on information about the situation in Ngaba to the outside world, a man named Gerik was arrested after he had reported on the death of Phuntsog, the Kirti Monastery monk who died of self-immolation on 16 March 2011. Gerik's family members were also subjected to harassment following his arrest, including the beatings of his wife and daughter in detention. His 23-year-old daughter in need of medical treatment was not allowed to go to a hospital.

Currently Tibet is virtually closed and foreign journalists are barred from visiting into the restive regions. All communication channels - Internet and phone lines are inaccessible where protests have occurred.

On the eve of the parliamentary session on 5 March of the National People's Congress, the head of the Communist Party in Tibet, Chen Quanguo, ordered local authorities to step up surveillance of all means of communication, particularly mobile phones and the Internet, in order to "maintain the public's interests and national security".

Foreign journalists, banned from entering Tibet, have been prevented by the police from covering demonstrations by Tibetans in other Chinese provinces. In the last week of January, in Sichuan province, a crew from *CNN* was arrested at a toll barrier and prevented from travelling to neighbouring Tibet.

Aware that such restrictions are unlawful, the authorities regularly cite bad weather or the poor state of the roads to restrict access to the autonomous region. Foreign journalists suspected of wishing to defy police instructions are victims of harassment by the security forces.

Some have complained of being followed, others that they have been escorted to the airport by the police, questioned for several hours, forced to wipe the pictures they have taken and have had their equipment seized. Identity checks are not confined to press cards and passports but include temporary residence permits, which journalists must carry with them at all times. These infringements create an atmosphere of constant surveillance, which add to the stress levels and affect the psychological well-being of some media workers.

On 2 February, some foreign correspondents working in China asked the authorities for free access to the provinces that were closed to them, claiming the right to travel freely and to interview anyone prepared to be interviewed.

In March, writer and blogger Tsering Woeser was placed under virtual house arrest in Beijing for a month.

Recently, the authorities have distributed the following message to all National media:

- Self-immolations in Lhasa shouldn't be reported without central order. No exception will be made. Starting from today, reporting on sensitive issues in Tibet and the four Tibetan areas in other provinces has to strictly abide to this notice. Every media should notify its staff, its subordinated newspapers, publications and websites.

- M Zhou Mou, party secretary of Li village, in the Yibin district, Luoyang city, is investigating on the murder of five people. The media shouldn't report on this matter for the moment.

This illustrates the government's policy towards Tibetan regions, and shows the control of information it operates. Since 24 January, Internet and cell phone networks have been severely disrupted within a radius of 50 km around Seda district in Sichuan province, which was the epicentre of the violent protests.

Websites of Tibetan exile media organizations cannot be accessed. Discussion forums and blogs in the Tibetan language, such as *Sangdhor.com* and *Rangdrol.net*, were also blocked since 3 February.

On the same day the tag of Liu Zhiming, an investigative journalist with the *Economic Observer*, who posted a message about a demonstration on 23 January, was removed from the micro-blogging site Sina Weibo. This is just one example among many of the removal of content referring to the current disturbances in Tibet.

To counter what they see as biased coverage of the country, the authorities do not hesitate to use disinformation. The French weekly "*Courrier International*", which translates and publishes excerpts of articles from international newspapers, was hacked by an official Chinese website, China Tibet Online, for propaganda purposes. It attributed an article translated from the Beijing newspaper *Global Times* to the Paris-based weekly.

The article, headlined "French media: harmony, development mostly desired for Tibetans", quoted a report from a remote area of Tibet purportedly published in *Courrier International*. The article in reality contained passages from *Global Times*, which is part of the *People's Daily* group. It condemned secessionist aims of Tibetan exiles abroad and was never published by *Courrier International*.

In view of the current human rights situation inside Tibet, Reporters without Borders would like to urge China:

- to respect rights of Tibetan people guaranteed in China's Constitution including religious freedom, freedom of expression and assembly;
- to allow unfettered access to international media, foreign diplomats and UN independent experts to all Tibetan restive regions;
- to provide detailed information on those Tibetan protesters and intellectuals who have been sentenced to imprisonment;
- to release all political prisoners without condition.

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