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## Human Rights Council

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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 the Fondation Danielle Mitterrand - France Libertés, 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.

[13 February 2012]

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

## **The question of the right to education in all Tibetan areas under Chinese administration**

### **Overview**

Education is a precondition to exercise the human rights. International law recognizes and respects the right to education as a fundamental right of child. In China, the Constitution and the 1986 Chinese law on “Compulsory Education” enshrine free nine years compulsory education for all nationalities. Regrettably, education is still unavailable and inaccessible to vast majority of Tibetans in Tibet.<sup>1</sup>

The Chairman of TAR, Gyaltsen Norbu, acknowledges that “one third of Children in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) cannot afford to go to school.”<sup>2</sup> As reported by Andrew Fischer, Tibetan rural illiteracy remained around 45 %, urban illiteracy around 41% and the proportion of the Tibetan population with secondary education and above is as low as 11.5%.<sup>3</sup>

The primary goal of PRC’s education policy for Tibetans has been to encourage patriotism towards China. School curriculum in Tibet is set in a way that is not relevant to the Tibetan culture and identity. Moreover, Tibetan students can be sent to schools outside Tibet to foster a sense of nationhood rather than to develop children’s personality, talents and mental abilities. A number of Tibetan youths escape to India each year to get an education.

According to the United Nations Development Program's National Human Development Report 2005, education in “TAR” is the worst among all of the 31 Chinese provinces. A reason given by the Chinese authorities for this disparity is the remoteness of Tibetan regions. However, a research report has shown that, remoteness was not the sole reason and economics is a major factor.<sup>4</sup>

### **Restriction on Tibetan language in schools**

Tibetan children's rights to education and protection of the Tibetan language plays a decisive role for Tibet's future: people who lose their language lose their cultural identity. Tibetan is the only language where the entire teachings of Buddha and that of other great Buddhist scholars are available. International law projects the vitality of language not only in the view of [re]production of cultural identities, but also, fundamental medium to express opinions and thoughts. However, the Chinese authorities view Tibetan language as a symbol of nationalist sentiment.

Freedom to use and develop its language is guaranteed by Article 53 of the PRC’s Constitution and in China’s 1995 Education Law.<sup>5</sup> However, Tibetan language is dropped from the curriculum or retained only as a language subject. As reported by the United States State Department, in Dartsedo (Ch: Kangding), Karze Prefecture, there are no elementary schools where Tibetans could study in Tibetan. In middle and high schools,

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<sup>1</sup> Annual Report, 2005, Tibetan Center For Democracy and Human Rights, pg 158

<sup>2</sup> On June 4, 1994, Conference on Education

<sup>3</sup> Tibet Watch Special Report, August 2007

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.tchrd.org/publications/topical\\_reports/next\\_generation\\_education-1997/](http://www.tchrd.org/publications/topical_reports/next_generation_education-1997/)

<sup>5</sup> Article 12 of the China’s 1995 Education Law

including some officially designated as Tibetan schools, Tibetan is taught as a language subject only.<sup>6</sup>

Tibetans in Tibet do not have a say in choice of school textbooks. The 2010 State Department report also indicates the Chinese government heavily controls the content of the textbooks and in schools, a "harmonized" version of Tibetan history is taught.

Tibetans seeking higher education face discrimination because course work in Tibetan is not given full weight and sometimes no weight in collage examinations.<sup>7</sup> Tibetan language and grammar books are disparaged, labeled "books of blind faith."

On 19 October 2010, thousands of Tibetan students from six different schools in Rebgong (Ch:Tongren) North Eastern part of Tibet (Ch:Qinghai province) protested against the Chinese government's educational policy of implementing Chinese language as the medium of instruction in all the primary schools by 2015.<sup>8</sup> Students called for equality for nationalities and languages.

### **Sending Tibetan students outside Tibet**

The PRC's so-called 1984 "Preferential Policy" of inland secondary classes and schools for Tibetan is a violation of the nationality right to hold the distinct cultural rights.

Under the banner of "intellectual aid scheme" Tibetan children with intellectual aptitude are involuntarily taken from schools in the TAR and sent to schools in other parts of China away from their families and Tibetan language and culture. The late Panchen Lama said that sending Tibetan children to China would only have the effect of alienating from their cultural roots.

On 31 August 2011, the prominent government of Qinghai announced its plan to send eighty middle school Tibetan students to Jiangsu, China to study.<sup>9</sup>

In the inland schools, out of 34-43 periods that Tibetan students attend in a week, depending upon their grade level, only 4-5 periods cover Tibetan language and rest of the curriculum is identical to mainstream Chinese schools.<sup>10</sup>

### **Education or indoctrination**

According to Catriona Bass "ideological and patriotic education is an important component of the Chinese state's discourse on education to Tibetans."<sup>11</sup> Even for the selection of Tibetan students to study in the inland secondary classes, "state ideology and morality" is strictly maintained.<sup>12</sup>

In 1994, the regional Party Secretary, Chen Kuiyuan, said in Lhasa: "The success of our education does not lie in the number of diplomas issued to graduates from universities, colleges...and secondary schools. It lies, in the final analysis, in whether our graduating

<sup>6</sup> 2010 State Department Report on Human Rights available in <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/eap/154382.htm>

<sup>7</sup> A/HRC/16/NGO/136 , 8 March 2011

<sup>8</sup> The only ethnic Tibetan region that still use Tibetan language beyond primary school

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.amdotibet.cn/html/dt/whjy/2011-08/11465.html>

<sup>10</sup> State Schooling and the ethnic identity: The politics of a Tibetan Neidi Secondary School in China by Zhiyong Zhu, 2007

<sup>11</sup> C. Bass, Education in Tibet (1998).

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*

students are opposed to or turn their hearts to the Dalai Clique and in whether they are loyal to or do not care about our great motherland and the great socialist cause”.

Zhou Ji, Chinese Minister of Education, declared that one of the major areas in which his department will concentrate is to “strengthen and improve ideology and ethnic education for primary and secondary school students<sup>13</sup>”.

As reported in the annual report of Congressional-Executive Commission on China in 2005, the minority education policy goes much further than inculcating socialist and communist ideology; Beijing is making an “increasingly blunt efforts to assimilate Tibetan children through the education system.”

Students at Ngaba Prefecture Middle School for Nationalities staged a hunger strike in support of Phuntsok, who immolated on 16 March 2011. In response, the Chinese authorities detained students, seized and burned books that did not have an official stamp of Chinese Communist Party.<sup>14</sup>

## Conclusion

Educational standard in mainland China is praised by the government, educators, many intellectuals, and researchers. However, “minorities” education system is regarded as a tool to foster a sense of nationhood and preaches communist ideologies. The form and content of the school curriculum contradicts the national equality.

We call on the Human Rights Council to urge People's Republic of China:

- to respect the Tibetan children rights to education as enshrines in the PRC Constitution and international treaties;
- to remove all restrictions on the Tibetan language;
- to allow the Tibetan to have say in setting school curriculum and contents of text books;
- to provide education with an aim to develop each child’s full potential.

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<sup>13</sup> Speech by Zhou Ji, Minister of Education Press conference sponsored by the State Council Information Office

<sup>14</sup> China: Tibetan students held in school, Radio Free Asia, 9 May 2011, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4dd288f423.html>