

# The Spring Uprising in Tibet and China's Crackdown

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**CAMPAIGN  
FOR TIBET**  
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**APRIL, 2008, TIBET.** Nomads on horseback gallop down a rough trail towards a small town; a monk is seen raising his fist in the air, crying: “Return the Dalai Lama to Tibet!” The crowd around him roars its support. The blurred image shifts, and we see Tibetans tearing down a red Chinese flag, and raising the banned Tibetan national flag, two snow lions flanked by the Himalayan mountains.

The bold protest by the nomads and monks of Amchok Bora in eastern Tibet (which can be viewed on YouTube except in China), is one of the defining images of the protests that swept across the Tibetan plateau since March 10 when hundreds of monks took to the streets in Lhasa. This tidal wave of protests has been the most significant uprising against Chinese misrule in Tibet in more than half a century and has as yet unknown consequences for the Chinese government in Tibet. Since March, one or more protests have been reported in at least 52 county-level locations in Tibetan areas of China, as well as in Chengdu (the capital of Sichuan Province), Lanzhou (the capital of Gansu Province), and Beijing, where Tibetan students held a silent vigil for those harmed or killed in the crackdown.

A new cycle of protests was sparked by the repression that followed the March protests and by the implementation of an intensified ‘patriotic education’ campaign requiring pledges of allegiance to the Chinese government and the denunciation of the Dalai Lama. In a single instance in May, more than 80 nuns were imprisoned in the Tibetan area of



**Protests near Labrang Monastery, March 14th, 2008**

Kardze, Sichuan for peacefully protesting against the violent crackdown and calling for the Dalai Lama’s return to Tibet.

The Spring 2008 protests revealed fundamental flaws in the central government’s Tibet policy. Beijing has had decades of unfettered control in Tibet to deliver good governance compatible with the cultural priorities of the Tibetan people. By any measure, it has failed. While Beijing abandoned its Cultural Revolution era approach in most of China, in Tibet it has instituted new hardline policies that target the Tibetan Buddhist identity and its most visible leaders; patriotic education has become the tool of the Chinese propagandist, the Tibetan language has been downgraded in usage and replaced with Mandarin Chinese, and there is an increasing influx of Chinese migrants, further marginalising the Tibetan population — all of this done in the absence of safeguards that would protect traditional Tibetan livelihoods and the fragile environment.

In the Spring of 2008 the Tibetan people had reached a breaking point and in risking their lives to make their position known, they propelled Tibet to the top of the international news agenda, forcing governments and heads of state to view Tibet as an international issue, resolvable only through political means. The take-away message from the Tibetan protests was: The Dalai Lama, and not the Chinese state, represents our interests.

The Chinese government’s response to the protests has been a massive troop deployment across the Tibetan plateau.



**Chinese response to Lhasa protest, March 14th, 2008**

Monks and nuns have been the primary targets and monasteries were swiftly sealed and encircled by armed soldiers. Thousands of Tibetans from all walks of life have simply disappeared. Since early March, someone has disappeared from almost every Tibetan household in Lhasa, where people still sleep in their clothes, fearful of a knock on the door in the middle of the night. Many Tibetans have been taken to detention facilities far from their homes, and hundreds have been seen taken out of Lhasa on the new train to prisons in Qinghai province.

Yet, in the more than 125 protests across the Tibetan plateau since monks from Drepung monastery conducted their peaceful protest on March 10, only the outburst on March 14 in Lhasa appears to have escalated to serious violence and to have caused innocent deaths. Certainly, there were other incidents that resulted in damage to private property and targeted police stations or other symbols of the government's presence in Tibet. For example, it appears that thousands of Chinese flags were ripped down from poles and destroyed. There are no discernable numbers from official or other sources for Tibetans or police and other security personnel injured or killed in the protests.

In the weeks, now months, since the protests began, the Chinese government has sealed off much of Tibet from the outside world.

Tibet is at a turning point in its history and the future of the Tibetan people is in the balance. The Chinese leadership must reflect on the failures of its strategy for Tibet and the extent to which Tibetan grievances emerge from a deep-

seated sense of national identity and dispossession. It is in China's long term interest to recognize its role in the dynamics that led to the current instability across the Tibetan plateau.

The international community has an important role to play in ensuring that the Chinese government provides a full accounting of the Spring 2008 protests and their consequences, and moves forward in substantive, meaningful dialogue with the only legitimate representative of the Tibetan people, the Dalai Lama. Tibetans have put their lives on the line for nothing less than that.

For up to date reports on the evolving situation in Tibet, see <http://www.savetibet.org/news/insidetibet.php> <<http://www.savetibet.org/news/insidetibet.php>>. To join a free mailing list to receive these reports, send an email to: [press@savetibet.org](mailto:press@savetibet.org) <<mailto:press@savetibet.org>> with 'subscribe' in the subject header.

# Chinese Rule in Tibet

**FOR CENTURIES, TIBET** — a vast high altitude plateau between China and India — remained remote from the rest of the world with a widely dispersed population of nomads, farmers, monks and traders. In 1949, following the foundation of the Chinese Communist state, the People's Liberation Army invaded Tibet and soon overpowered its poorly equipped army and guerilla resistance. In March 1959, Tibetans rose up against the Chinese occupiers. The uprising was crushed, and the Dalai Lama escaped to India, followed by some 80,000 Tibetans. Tens of thousands of Tibetans who remained were killed or imprisoned. Since 1949, hundreds of thousands have died as a direct result of China's policies. In 1959, 1961 and 1965 (before the People's Republic of China was a member of the United Nations), the General Assembly passed resolutions condemning human rights violations in Tibet and affirming the Tibetans' right to self-determination.

China claims to have wiped out theocracy, feudalism and slavery in Tibet. But there never was systemized slavery in the traditional Tibetan society and it is also incorrect to characterize old Tibet as feudal. It was certainly not theocratic — as Buddhists do not believe in God. There was a system of labor and land management in central Tibet that analysts have compared to manorial serfdom, insofar as peasants were hereditarily tied to land held by nobles and monasteries to whom they owed various services. However, the eastern Tibetan rangelands were largely ruled through tribal systems. The modern Chinese Communist Party (CCP) terminology of feudalism, theocracy and slavery draws from Marxist theories of ethnicity that were elaborated by Stalin in the 1930s and then later adapted to China by the CCP. To the frustration of many Tibetan and Chinese scholars in China, public presentations on Tibet from within China still remain heavily constrained by this official ideology.

Tibetan Buddhism is an integral element of Tibetan national identity and, consequently, has been a prime target for suppression by the Chinese government. Approximately 6,000 religious institutions and their contents were destroyed from the period of the Chinese invasion through the Cultural Revolution. Today, the CCP continues to try to undermine the Dalai Lama's role in Tibet and to maintain strict control over most aspects of religion. For example, political cam-



**Chinese troops in the Barkhor area of Lhasa on March 10 2008, when Drepung monks led a peaceful protest to mark the anniversary of Lhasa's Uprising in 1959. This led to a tidal wave of protests against Chinese rule across the Tibetan plateau, which continues today.**

paigns or “patriotic re-education” require forced denunciations of the Dalai Lama, and obtaining a proper religious education remains extremely difficult or impossible in Tibet.

The Chinese government severely restricts the rights of Tibetans, including the freedoms of speech, press, association, and religion. Tibetan political prisoners endure harsh prison conditions and torture. There is an ongoing security crackdown at present due to hundreds of demonstrations that swept across the Tibetan plateau in Spring 2008.

The Chinese central government is transforming Tibet through its Western development plan, launched in 1999 to accelerate economic development across the plateau. The central element of the plan has been the separation of Tibetan nomads from their traditional livelihoods and their resettlement into urban centers concurrent with the movement of Chinese economic migrants up and onto the Tibetan plateau, facilitated by the construction of a new railroad, linking the Chinese interior to central Tibet. Many are calling this act of social reengineering the “second invasion of Tibet.” The Chinese government has elected to pursue a development model for Tibet that increases rather than narrows the gap between Chinese and Tibetans and risks undermining its objective for a stable Tibet within the People's Republic of China.

# Defining Tibet

**TIBET WAS TRADITIONALLY COMPRISED OF THREE MAIN REGIONS:** Amdo (northeastern Tibet), Kham (eastern Tibet) and U-Tsang (central and western Tibet). The Tibet Autonomous Region was established by the Chinese government in 1965 and covers the area of Tibet west of the Yangtse River (Tibetan: Driчу), including part of Kham. The rest of Amdo and Kham have been incorporated into Chinese provinces, and designated as Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures and Tibetan Autonomous Counties. As a result, most of Qinghai and parts of Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan Provinces are acknowledged by the Chinese authorities to be “Tibet autonomous”. The term “Tibet” is used to refer to all of these Tibetan areas currently under the jurisdiction of the People’s Republic of China.

## **Recommendations on Tibet** *by the International Campaign for Tibet*

The uprising during the spring of 2008 and the continuing tensions in Tibet result from the failure of the government of the People’s Republic of China to implement a system of genuine autonomy for Tibetans concurrent with its campaign to dilute the Tibetan identity and, in particular, to constrain the practice of Tibetan Buddhism, of which devotion to the Dalai Lama is an integral element.

A political solution is possible. Envoys of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Chinese officials have been engaged in a dialogue since September 2002. Unfortunately, six years of sporadic dialogue have not progressed to substantive negotiations and have not met the expectations of the international community, including several heads of state, for meaningful progress towards a mutually-agreeable solution for Tibet

The Tibetan position in the dialogue is that Tibetans be able to maintain their distinctive Tibetan identity into the future. Central to this position is the political right of autonomy provided to all Tibetans living in contiguous Tibetan areas, an area roughly defined by the geography of the Tibetan plateau, governed by a single administrative unit under a single unified policy. According to the Chinese government’s own

analysis of its law on regional ethnic autonomy, the Tibetan people are entitled to the full political right of autonomy:

- full decision-making power in economic and social development undertakings;
- freedom to inherit and develop traditional culture and to practice religious belief;
- freedom to administer, protect and be the first to utilize natural resources; and
- freedom to independently develop educational and cultural undertakings.

Given the disappointing results of the dialogue, the instability in Tibet and the unjustifiably and disproportionately harsh consequences for Tibetans involved in the spring 2008 demonstrations, and the intensification of Chinese government campaigns against the influence of the Dalai Lama, ICT offers the following recommendations:

## **For the Government of the People’s Republic of China:**

1. Provide unimpeded access to Tibet for UN human rights experts and other independent observers to investigate the human rights situation in Tibet;
2. Release immediately and unconditionally all those detained solely for engaging in peaceful protest;
3. Provide an accounting of all who have been killed or gone missing and for all those detained, including names, whereabouts and charges against them;
4. Ensure that all detainees have prompt access to family members and any medical treatment they may require, lawyers of their choice, legal documents in the Tibetan language, and are treated in accordance with the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment, to which the People’s Republic of China is a party;
5. Provide unrestricted foreign media access to all areas of China, including Tibet, in keeping with the “Free and

Open Olympics” promised in the Beijing Olympic Action Plan; and

6. Allow an independent investigation of Chinese government claims that the Dalai Lama orchestrated the March 14 demonstration in Lhasa and seeks to disrupt the Beijing Olympics. The Dalai Lama has consistently stated that he supports the Beijing Olympics.

### **For other governments and heads of state:**

7. Heads of state should not attend the 2008 Olympics Opening Ceremony, unless there is meaningful progress in the dialogue and efforts to address the crisis situation in Tibet. Those who have confirmed attendance should press Chinese President Hu Jintao for a commitment to meet face-to-face with the Dalai Lama;
8. Continue to work multilaterally for meaningful progress in the Tibetan-Chinese dialogue and consider the establishment of a Contact Group for Tibet as well as other means to enhance regular contacts, exchanges of views and coordination on Tibetan issues;

9. In addition to quiet diplomacy, recognize that assertive and visible engagement with the Chinese government can yield positive consequences and provide hope to Tibetans that a peaceful solution is possible;
10. Support politically and financially efforts to address chronic needs, as articulated by the Tibetan people, for assistance in such areas as education, work force development, environmental protection, and sustainable development; and
11. Adopt a common position that heads of state meet with the Dalai Lama as the preeminent Tibetan leader and also press for his participation in appropriate global forums.

### **For the international community:**

12. Foreign broadcast and other media outlets actively seek access to Tibet and Tibetans in order to provide the world an accurate portrayal of Chinese rule in Tibet.

# Tibet and the Dalai Lama

*“For as long as space endures, and for as long as living beings remain,  
until then may I too abide to dispel the misery of the world.”*

— Eighth century Buddhist saint, Shantideva

**HIS HOLINESS THE 14TH DALAI LAMA OF TIBET, TENZIN GYATSO,**



**Early photo of His Holiness  
the 14th Dalai Lama**

was born to a peasant family on July 6, 1935 in the village of Takster in the Amdo area of northeast Tibet (present-day Qinghai Province). When 2-years old, he was recognized by a search committee of senior monks and Lhasa officials, in accordance with Tibetan tradition, as the reincarnation of the previous Dalai Lama. He was enthroned on February 22, 1940 in Lhasa, the Tibetan capital.

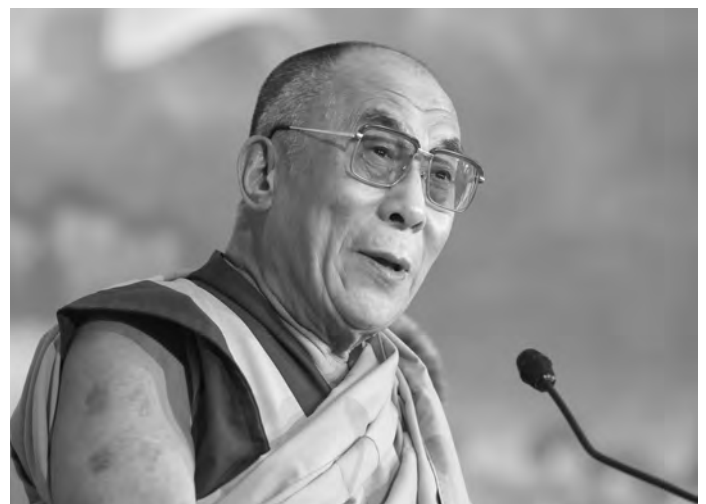
Fundamentally, the Dalai Lama is believed to be the manifestation of Avalokitesvara, the Bodhissatva of Compassion and the protector deity of Tibet who chooses to reincarnate to serve and help ease the suffering of the people. According to Tibet’s unique system, the Dalai Lama serves as both the temporal leader of the Tibetan people and the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism. While over the centuries, influence over the Tibetan nation had expanded and contracted according to the ambitions of Tibetan leaders and their Chinese and Mongolian neighbors, from 1911 Tibet was effectively an independent country, with full control over its domestic and international affairs.

Soon after Mao Zedong proclaimed the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, he announced his intention to liberate Tibet from Western imperialism and, in 1949–1950, the People’s Liberation Army invaded Tibet. The regents in Tibet, holding governmental authority until the Dalai Lama reached his maturity, decided to install the 15-year old Dalai Lama immediately as the country’s temporal leader. In 1951, the Lhasa government sent a delegation for peace talks in Beijing. The delegation was compelled by threat of further military incursions to sign the “Agreement on the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet.” Three years later, the 19-year old Dalai

Lama himself traveled to Beijing where he was hosted by Mao. It was during their final meeting that Mao famously told the Dalai Lama, “Religion is poison.”

During the 1950s, thousands fled the implementation of socialist reforms in eastern Tibet, flooding Lhasa, and making the relationship between the Tibetan government and Beijing increasingly untenable. In 1959, an uprising erupted provoked by the fear that an invitation to the Dalai Lama extended by the Chinese garrison in Lhasa would result in his kidnapping or worse. The Dalai Lama was forced to flee for his life. Since 1960, he has resided in Dharamsala, India, where he has established a government in exile and sought to implement a democratic system of governance for the long-staying refugee community numbering around 125,000 Tibetans.

In the tradition of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., the Dalai Lama has become one of the great proponents of non-violence and advocated peaceful solutions based on tolerance and mutual respect. For this, he has won the admiration of the world and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 and the U.S. Congressional Gold Medal in 2007.



**Nobel Peace Prize winner, the Dalai Lama, acknowledged as  
one of the world’s greatest men of peace**

# The Crucial Nature of the Tibet Environment

**FROM A GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL PERSPECTIVE,** few places in the world are as important as the Tibetan plateau. Encompassing an area of over 2.5 million square kilometers, the Tibetan plateau is the largest and highest elevation region on the earth. With an average elevation of 4,500 meters above sea level, Tibet is encircled by high mountains — the Himalaya to the south, the Karakorum in the west and the Kunlun across the north. There are over 46,000 glaciers on the Tibetan plateau; the largest area of ice outside the polar regions.

Tibet, often referred to as the ‘roof of the world’ or the ‘world’s third pole’ because it contains the biggest ice fields outside of the Arctic and Antarctic, is threatened by melting glaciers and other extreme weather phenomena. Scientists believe that the Tibetan plateau offers an early warning of climate change and it is therefore a critical global climate barometer. Because Tibet plays a prominent role in the Asian monsoon system, the consequences will affect the lives of millions of people downstream as well as those on the high plateau.

The plateau is the source of many of Asia’s greatest rivers — the Yellow, Yangtze, Mekong, Brahmaputra, Ganges and



**There are few environments on earth as critical as the Tibetan plateau.**

Indus Rivers all originate here, and the water they provide is critical to the survival of millions of people downstream. What happens in Tibet has profound implications for hundreds of million of people, not only in China itself, but in neighboring countries.

A number of biodiversity ‘hotspots’ and eco-regions are located on the Tibetan plateau. With their distinctive species, ecological processes, and evolutionary phenomena, these areas are some of the most important areas on earth for conserving biodiversity. The Tibetan plateau also includes the most intact example of mountain rangelands in Asia with a relatively intact vertebrate fauna, and is one of the largest remaining terrestrial wilderness regions left in the world. The region supports rare and endangered wildlife species such as the wild yak, Tibetan wild ass, Tibetan antelope, Tibetan argali and snow leopard. Due to extensive resource extraction, poaching and unsustainable development, Tibetan ecosystems and many of their species are now endangered. Conserving these animals and their habitat is an important priority for the global community.

The Tibetan plateau is one of the earth’s important grazing ecosystems, encompassing about 1.65 million square kilo-



**New railway bridge to Lhasa – the railroad, opened in July 2006, has encouraged the influx of many more Chinese workers, marginalising the Tibetan population further.**

meters of grazing land. It contains the highest grasslands in the world and with a severe climate, it is one of the world's harshest grazing environments, yet these pastures supply forage for an estimated 12 million yaks and 30 million sheep and goats and provide livelihood for about 5 million pastoralists and agro-pastoralists. More than 80% of Tibetans live in rural areas, and for centuries, the majority have sustained themselves through a nomadic herder lifestyle, uniquely adapted to the harsh conditions and fragile ecosystem of the Tibetan plateau.

The implementation of Chinese government policies to settle Tibetan nomads and to resettle Tibetans in towns is now threatening the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of people and imperilling the Tibetan landscape. These policies, based on an urban industrial model and imposed by planners in Beijing, are counterproductive: they have made nomads poorer and degraded Tibet's vast grasslands. Scientific research has established that the mobility of the herds keeps the grasslands healthy, that taking nomads off the land does not help conserve water resources, and that herdspeople denied their livelihood become demoralized and dependent. One of the last examples of sustainable nomadic pastoralism on this planet faces extinction unless this policy is soon changed.

Tibet's precious high-altitude environment is increasingly endangered by Chinese government policies. Conserving the environment of the Tibetan plateau requires a better understanding of its unique ecology and the collaboration of all of the people who have a stake in the future of Tibet. The challenge is to balance the diverse economic, cultural and social needs of the inhabitants of the Tibetan plateau with the need to maintain the environment and conserve the biodiversity and cultural heritage of the landscape. This calls for strength-

ened participation by Tibetan communities in the development process. It also requires that indigenous knowledge is better understood, including the efficacy of many traditional natural resource management practices.

Tibet's harsh and rugged climate masks a fragile ecosystem that is vulnerable to the effects of global climate change — studies have found the effects of global warming more pronounced at higher elevations. The many civil engineering projects in Tibet, such as the construction of the railroad, combined with a conscious effort by China to urbanize the Tibetan plateau, will lead to further and likely greatly accelerated population increases and land surface changes in the future.

Meteorological disasters exacerbated by global warming such as the rising of the snowline, the retreat of glaciers, the northward movement of permafrost, the loss of grassland, the eastward spread of desertification and the loss of biodiversity, are all posing an ever greater threat to Tibet's ecological systems. Scientists predict that the land cover on the Tibetan plateau will significantly change due to global warming, and the United Nations has reported that there will be no snow and ice in the Himalayas in 50 years.

For recommendations on a way forward for Tibet, see 'Tracking the Steel Dragon: How China's economic policies and the railway are transforming Tibet', report by the International Campaign for Tibet, [www.savetibet.org](http://www.savetibet.org)

# The Sino-Tibetan Dialogue

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**IN SEPTEMBER 2002, THE ENVOYS OF THE DALAI LAMA** arrived in Beijing to take part in what has become the most serious round of Sino-Tibetan talks since the early 1990s. The dialogue has been conducted on behalf of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) by officials (principally ministers and vice ministers) of the United Front Work Department, which serves as a gatekeeper to other offices of the CCP and government. The latest 7th round of dialogue took place on July 2 in Beijing and was characterized by Lodi Gyaltzen Gyari, Special Envoy of the Dalai Lama, as one of the most difficult and disappointing discussions so far (see: <http://savetibet.org/news/newsitem.php?id=1333>).

Since conceding Tibetan independence in the late 1980s, the Dalai Lama has sought to achieve genuine autonomy for Tibetans within the People's Republic of China. Central to the Tibetan position is the political right of autonomy provided to all Tibetans living in contiguous Tibetan areas, an area roughly defined by the geography of the Tibetan plateau, governed by a single administrative unit under a single unified policy. According to the Chinese government's own analysis of its law on regional ethnic autonomy, the Tibetan people are entitled to the full political right of autonomy: full decision-making power in economic and social development undertakings; freedom to inherit and develop traditional culture and to practice religious belief; freedom to administer, protect and be the first to utilize natural resources; and freedom to independently develop educational and cultural undertakings.

The Tibet Autonomous Region was set up by the Chinese government in 1964. Surrounding areas on the Tibetan plateau, now incorporated into Chinese provinces, have also been designated by the government as Tibetan autonomous prefectures and counties. However, Tibetan autonomy as provided for in the Chinese Constitution and laws has failed to deliver genuine autonomy to Tibetans.

Regarding a solution for Tibet reached through dialogue, the Dalai Lama says: "I firmly believe that this is of mutual benefit both to the Tibetans and the Chinese. We Tibetans will be able to develop Tibet with China's assistance, while at the same time preserving our own unique culture, spirituality,



**Envoys to the Dalai Lama, Lodi Gyari (left center) and Kelsang Gyaltzen (left) meet with Chinese Party officials Du Qinglin (right center) and Zhu Weiqun (right).** Photo: Central Tibetan Administration

and delicate environment. By amicably resolving the Tibetan issue, China will be able to contribute to her own unity and stability."

Support for meaningful, substantive dialogue between the two sides has come not only externally from governments and heads of state, but increasingly from within China. Public awareness of the Sino-Tibetan dialogue, although limited, created a new space for discussion of Tibet. One document circulating among Chinese Party officials stated, "Anyone who thinks the Tibet issue should be dragged on until after the death of the 14th Dalai Lama is naive, unwise, and [supporting] the wrong policy." A provocative essay by Beijing-based Wang Lixiong was entitled "The Dalai Lama is the Key to the Tibet Problem." (See: Sino-Tibetan Dialogue in the Post-Mao era: Lessons and Prospects by Tashi Rabgey and Tseten Wangchuk Sharlho, [www.eastwestcenter.org](http://www.eastwestcenter.org) <<http://www.eastwestcenter.org>> .)

However, in reaction to the Spring 2008 protests in Tibet, Beijing began to stir up Chinese nationalist sentiments against the Dalai Lama. Lodi Gyari has responded that Chinese officials "realizing that their allegations against His Holiness for instigating the recent events in Tibet and in

sabotaging the Olympics Games have become untenable, they are now urging His Holiness not to *support* violence, terrorism, and sabotaging the Olympics.” The Dalai Lama has consistently reiterated his support for the Beijing Olympics and is acknowledged internationally as one of the world’s greatest men of peace.

At considerable risk, 29 Chinese intellectuals and writers responded to the Tibetan protests with an open letter to the Chinese government that appeared in March on several Chinese language websites entitled “Twelve Suggestions for Dealing with the Tibetan Situation.” The letter urges the government to “stop the violent suppression” in Tibet and appeals to the Tibetan people not to engage in violent activities. It also urges the Chinese government to end the propaganda and news blockade, saying: “The one-sided propaganda of the official Chinese media is having the effect of stirring up inter-ethnic animosity and aggravating an already tense

situation. This is extremely detrimental to the long-term goal of safeguarding national unity.” The letter also condemns the hostile rhetoric used by government spokespeople to describe the Dalai Lama as not “in keeping with the situation, nor is it beneficial to the Chinese government’s image. As the Chinese government is committed to integrating into the international community, we maintain that it should display a style of governing that conforms to the standards of modern civilization.” (An English translation is published at <http://www.savetibet.org/news/newsitem.php?id=1245> <<http://www.savetibet.org/news/newsitem.php?id=1245>> .) More than 200 Chinese signed the petition.

A next round of dialogue has been agreed to by the Tibetans and Chinese for late October 2008.

# Religious Repression in Tibet

**THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT'S IMPLEMENTATION OF STATE RELIGIOUS POLICY** is particularly harsh in Tibet. Tibetan Buddhism is an integral element of Tibetan identity and Tibetan nationalism and therefore, is perceived as a potential threat to the unity of the country and the authority of the Communist Party, which requires Chinese citizens to 'love the country' above all else.

China attempts to convey an image to the world of government tolerance for religion. In Tibet, it may appear that some monastic institutions are thriving, and that Tibetans are still able to express their devotion through traditional rituals; yet, the reality behind the appearance is quite different. Monasteries that once housed thousands of monks are now reduced to a few hundred whose main responsibility is no longer religious study but tending to the buildings and tourists.

As part of the tight control and regulation of religious practice in Tibetan monasteries and nunneries, the powers of the Democratic Management Committees have been strengthened. They have supplanted the traditional role of the abbots and are responsible to the Communist Party for control of religious institutions. 'Patriotic education' campaigns, are a regular feature of monastic life and are at times intense. These campaigns are carried out to identify patriotic monks and nuns and separate and expel perceived troublemakers. A core requirement of patriotic education is to denounce the Dalai Lama.

A new element of patriotic education emphasizes the importance of upholding the Communist Party line on the Beijing Summer 2008 Olympics. A recent report in China's state media links patriotic education with ensuring "security and stability" during the Olympics and provided the example of a monastery in Lhundrub (Chinese: Linzhou) county in the Tibet Autonomous Region where patriotic education includes passing onto monks "relevant knowledge" about the Olympics.

Chinese government authorities have used the Spring 2008 protests in Tibet as justification for imposing further restrictions on monasteries. The intensification of patriotic education has been accompanied by punitive searches of



**Jokhang monk answers to Chinese security personnel.**

monasteries by security forces (including those previously uninvolved in protests), arrests of monks for possession of photos of the Dalai Lama, and the requirement that individuals sign statements confessing involvement in the protests. In many cases, heads of monasteries have had to promise to fly the Chinese flag and guarantee that no further demonstrations will take place. Monks without proper residency permits are expelled and sent home. Some monks have chosen to leave voluntarily after finding the new levels of surveillance too burdensome to their religious practice. Laypeople are also being targeted in this new round of patriotic education with demands that they denounce the Dalai Lama and pledge loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party.

Reaction to the intensification of 'patriotic education' campaigns that followed the Spring 2008 demonstrations appears to have contributed to a second wave of dissent in Tibet.

# Tourism in Tibet

**ACCELERATED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UNDER CURRENT CHINESE GOVERNMENT POLICIES** and, in particular, the advent of the railroad and resulting increase in tourism, have heightened concerns for the survival of Tibet's unique identity. Ironically, as the Chinese authorities market Tibet to Chinese as a tourist destination based on the "exotic" spiritual attractions of its Buddhist culture and landscape, they are tightening control over Tibetan religious expression and practice by the Tibetan people.

Today in Tibet, courtyards where hundreds of monks were once taught and debated scriptures are now occupied by photo booths where Chinese tourists wear garish versions of traditional costumes to pose for the camera. In parts of eastern Tibet, entire monasteries are run as commercial concerns where the salespeople dress in maroon robes, attempting to sell incense, statues and paintings to tourists.

Tourism hit an all time high in Tibet in 2007, with just over 4 million visitors, an increase of 64 percent year-on-year. Chinese officials explained the increase as the result of better marketing and improved transport links, including the controversial train to Lhasa from Golmud that began service in July 2006. The Chinese government forecast that the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) would receive at least 5 million tourists in 2008 — a figure that is nearly twice its population according to Chinese statistics. It is unlikely that figure will be met, as in the immediate wake of the protests in Lhasa (and elsewhere in Tibet) in mid-March 2008, the Chinese authorities barred all tourists from entering the Tibet Autonomous Region.

Domestic tourism to the TAR resumed in time for the national week-long May Day vacation in early May 2008, six weeks after the unrest in Lhasa. Only a trickle of Chinese tourists traveled to Lhasa, where many buildings were still shuttered and smoke-stained following the March 14 unrest, and police still lined the streets. Government spokespeople were initially vague about when *foreign* tourists would be allowed back to the TAR, with most observers guessing not until after the Olympics finished in late August, and probably not until the Paralympics finished in September. However, a spokesperson announced in late June 2008 that tour groups



**Chinese tourists in Tibet**

— as opposed to individual, independent travelers — were to be accepted again as of June 25, 2008.

For the foreseeable future, tour groups are likely to face the most cumbersome and expensive application procedures ever seen for entering the TAR. Chinese authorities claim that these restrictions are intended to protect foreign tourists from possible instances of further unrest; but they are also well aware that foreign tourists in Tibet have witnessed and reported on instances of severe human rights abuses against the Tibetan people.

TAR officials set a target of 3.4 billion yuan (US \$460 million) in revenue from tourism in 2007 and expect at least 6 billion yuan (US \$770 million) from 6 million tourists in 2010. But analysts report that much of the revenue from tourism leaves the region. Development economist Andrew Fischer, a specialist on Tibet's economy, says: "Most of the tourists visiting the TAR are Chinese nationals and they mostly stay in Chinese-owned and -run hotels on the west side of Lhasa, close to an abundant supply of Chinese restaurants and entertainment centers, complete with Chinese brothels and Chinese sex workers, who obviously service the military personnel and cadres stationed there as well. It is likely that much of the revenue that such tourism generates is channeled through such venues and eventually out of the province altogether. Under such conditions, the tourism

industry will have a difficult time functioning as a self-sustaining pillar industry that accumulates capital and profits in the TAR, rather than servicing as another drain from which incoming resources flow back out of the province almost as fast as they enter.” (See: ICT report, Tracking the Steel Dragon, [www.savetibet.org](http://www.savetibet.org).)

The Chinese government prioritizes fast-track economic development above cultural protection, and changes in Chinese laws and regulations tend to decrease the protection

of the Tibetan language and culture. The commoditization of Tibetan culture and promotion of “Tibet chic” by government and business coincides with a trend towards repression and, in fact, the weakening of Tibetan identity. The replacement of Tibetan tour guides with Chinese guides is just one example of how the authorities block Tibetans interpreting their culture to visitors and the outside world.