

Tibetan students hold vigil in Beijing; Curfew imposed in Xinjiang towns

International Campaign for Tibet

March 17th, 2008



Protest held by Tibetans at the Central Minorities University in Beijing. (Photo: ICT)

Tibetan students held a silent vigil in Beijing today to honor the courage of Tibetan protestors in Tibet. The group of around 50 students (pictured) sat silently in a circle with heads bowed outside the Central Minorities University in the Haidian district of western Beijing this evening for around six hours. They were surrounded by an official security cordon preventing outsiders and other students from joining the protest, although some foreign reporters succeeded in gaining brief access to the protestors.

While some Tibetan students are known to have taken part in the pro-democracy demonstrations at Tiananmen Square in June 1989, this is the first known demonstration by Tibetans in China's capital.

According to a source who received a message from Beijing, the students were allowed to leave at around 1 am, which appears to indicate that the authorities had followed a strategy of containing the protest in order to avoid provoking further dissent. It is not clear whether reprisals will follow. One source reported that a senior Beijing official arrived at the protest to ensure it was closed peacefully.

There was also a peaceful protest today by students at the South-Western Minorities University in Chengdu, although details could not be confirmed at the time of going to press.

These two peaceful vigils follow a peaceful sit-down protest yesterday (March 16) of around 200 Tibetan students on the campus of the Northwest Minority University in Lanzhou, the capital of Gansu province. In a message to a Tibetan in exile, one of the students said: "We are staging our protest in a very peaceful means and we are going to hold a candle light vigil tonight." A foreign reporter who spoke to some of the students said that some of the students knew people who had been killed during the protests of the past week in Tibet, and that they wanted to pay silent tribute to their courage. One report said that some students in Lanzhou held a further sit-in today.

The protests by Tibetans in Beijing took place hours before the deadline imposed by the Chinese authorities for Tibetans to hand themselves in if they had taken part in rioting and demonstrations in Tibet's capital, Lhasa, over the past few days.

According to sources, the atmosphere in Lhasa is now 'terrifying', with soldiers carrying out house to house searches and taking people into custody. Tibetans who have pictures of the Dalai Lama are targeted and in some cases have been taken away. In an instant message communication with a Tibetan in exile, one Tibetan reported: "A [details withheld] university student child was taken by police. He was hit and as of now still can't stand." When asked why, the same source said: "Because he had a picture of Kundun [literally 'the presence', a reference to the Dalai Lama] around his neck."

A British newspaper, The Times, reported today that as the midnight deadline approached in Lhasa, four trucks in convoy made a slow progress along main roads, with about 40 people, mostly young Tibetan men and women, standing with their wrists handcuffed behind their backs, witnesses said. "A soldier stood behind each prisoner, hands on the back of their necks to ensure their heads were bowed," reported Jane Macartney from Beijing. "Loudspeakers on the trucks broadcast calls to anyone who had taken part in the violent riots on Friday, in which Han Chinese and Hui Muslims were stabbed and beaten and shops and business set on fire, to turn themselves in. Those who gave themselves up might be treated with leniency, the rest would face severe punishment, the broadcasts said." A blogger on a Chinese website also referred to the incident. Reliable sources informed ICT today that foreign non-governmental organizations had been asked to leave Lhasa, although details could not be confirmed.

Curfews imposed in Xinjiang

According to Uyghur sources, the authorities in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), or East Turkestan, have imposed curfews following the protests and crackdown in Tibet in at least two towns in Xinjiang, Kashgar, and Hotan. Perhaps fearing copycat protests, people have been instructed to be home by 10 pm, and there is a stepped up security presence of police with guard dogs. According to reliable reports, people found outside after 10 pm have been detained.



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Kai Müller
Geschäftsführer / *Executive Director*
International Campaign for Tibet Deutschland e.V.
Schönhauser Allee 163
10435 Berlin
Deutschland / *Germany*
Tel.: +49 (0) 30 27879086
Fax: +49 (0) 30 27879087
www.savetibet.de