

## **China's Colonial Boarding Schools in Tibet<sup>1</sup> Study, 2023**

Prepared for: The House of Commons' Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

The Chinese government has established a vast network of colonial boarding schools in Tibet where students live separated from their families and are subjected to highly politicized education, primarily in Chinese. Touted by the Chinese government as a means of providing education to a sparse and far-flung population, the schools are the cornerstone of an assimilationist agenda advanced by Chinese President Xi Jinping, intended to preempt threats to Chinese Communist Party control by eliminating ethnic and cultural differences. The impact of the colonial boarding school experience on Tibetan children and their families – including psychological and emotional trauma – and the implications for whole generations of Tibetans and the long-term survival of Tibetan identity are grave.

### Contents:

1. Recommendations to the members of SDIR
2. Updates:
  - a. Swiss Government announces support for the recommendations of the *UN Committee*, and will address it at the 52nd session of the Human Rights Council, 1, April 23, 2023.
  - b. German Government calls for end to coercive boarding schools in Tibet, April 19, 2023.
  - c. U.S. Congressional Executive Commission on China holds a hearing on “*Preserving Tibet: Combating Cultural Erasure, Forced Assimilation and Transnational Repression*,” March 28, 2023.
  - d. UN Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights Recommends China abolish colonial boarding school system, March 22, 2023.
3. Supplementary documents:
  - a. Key Findings of “*Separated from their families, hidden from the world<sup>2</sup>*” report;
  - b. Human Rights Watch report on Bilingual education;
  - c. Human Rights Watch report on Mass DNA Collection in Tibet;
  - d. Citizen Lab report on Mass DNA Collection in Tibet Autonomous Region;
  - e. The State Council of China
    - i. Contradictory 2012 vs 2015 policies on education and intentional boarding school scheme for ‘ethnic education.’

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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<sup>1</sup> “Tibet” refers here to the Tibetan provinces of Amdo, Kham and U-Tsang, which the Chinese government split into new administrative divisions in the 1960s: the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures and Counties within Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan provinces

<sup>2</sup> Available at: <https://tibetaction.net/campaigns/colonialboardingschools>

Urge the Government of Canada to:

1. Echo the recommendations made by the UN Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights<sup>3</sup> and call on the Government of the People's Republic of China to immediately abolish the coerced residential school system imposed on Tibetan children, allow private Tibetan schools to be established and ensure Mandarin is not the only language of instruction allowed in schools in Tibet.
2. Issue an Item Statement at the 53rd session of the UN Human Rights Council expressing deep concern about China's system of colonial boarding schools and preschools in Tibet.
3. Sponsor a UN side event on China's colonial boarding schools in Tibet at the 53rd session of the UN Human Rights Council.
4. Call on the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to express serious concern about China's colonial boarding school system in Tibet.
5. Recommend China immediately abolish the system of colonial boarding schools in Tibet during the 4th cycle of China's Universal Periodic Review in January 2024.
6. Impose sanctions on Chinese officials, including the Provincial Party Secretaries and heads of government bodies and especially the intellectual architects<sup>4</sup> responsible for designing and implementing the colonial boarding school system and "national common language" policy that replaces Tibetan with Chinese as the medium of instruction in Tibetan schools, under the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act.
7. Call on China to grant the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Special Procedures, and other independent human rights experts immediate, meaningful, and unfettered access to Tibet, including access to colonial boarding schools and especially boarding preschools.
8. Call on China, and in particular on the National People's Congress Standing Committee of China, to uphold and enforce the current constitutional and statutory protections for Tibetan language promotion and preservation and to condemn any effort to erode laws protecting the use of minority languages in the education context.
9. Fund Tibetan organizations working to preserve and advance Tibetan language and culture, especially the establishment of Tibetan language programs and schools for Tibetans living in Canada and other diaspora communities.

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<sup>3</sup> Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Concluding observations on the third periodic report of China, including Hong Kong, China, and Macao, China, 03/22/23  
[\\*https://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=4slO6QSmlBEDzFEovLCuW%2BALqOml1btoJd4YxREVF2UhnJqajOdf70Jna4zIzltiWL2Gm56NxTNU%2B5uvm%2Bz8Ck3PyH5SB2c78KQhI%2FC1g9riHvZuzWKzpwTA2dN1MIy](https://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=4slO6QSmlBEDzFEovLCuW%2BALqOml1btoJd4YxREVF2UhnJqajOdf70Jna4zIzltiWL2Gm56NxTNU%2B5uvm%2Bz8Ck3PyH5SB2c78KQhI%2FC1g9riHvZuzWKzpwTA2dN1MIy)

<sup>4</sup> List of officials and intellectual architects for sanctions available upon request.



**Tibet Action Institute**

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## UPDATES

- A. Swiss Government announced support for the recommendations of the *UN Committee*, and will be addressing it at the 52nd session of the Human Rights Council, April 23, 2023:  
<https://www.parlament.ch/fr/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaefte?AffairId=20237230>
- B. German Government calls for end to coercive boarding school system in Tibet, April 19, 2023: <https://www.bundestag.de/presse/hib/kurzmeldungen-943646>
- C. U.S. Congressional Executive Commission on China holds hearing on Preserving Tibet: Combating Cultural Erasure, Forced Assimilation and Transnational Repression, March 28, 2023:  
<https://www.cecc.gov/events/hearings/preserving-tibet-combating-cultural-erasure-forced-assimilation-and-transnational>
- D. UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recommends China immediately abolish coercive colonial boarding school system in Tibet in its *Concluding observations on the third periodic report of China*, final version published on March 22, 2023:  
[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2FC.12%2FCHN%2FCO%2F3&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2FC.12%2FCHN%2FCO%2F3&Lang=en)

## SUPPLEMENTARY DOCUMENTS

In 2021, Tibet Action Institute released a report, “*Separated from their families, hidden from the world*,”<sup>5</sup> which provides groundbreaking research on the colonial boarding school system.

### Key findings:

- ❖ Tibet’s education system has become **primarily residential**; official data shows that approximately 800,000 Tibetan children aged six to 18 – 78% of Tibetan students – are living in colonial boarding schools;
- ❖ Tibetan parents are **compelled to send** their children to boarding schools due to a lack of alternatives, and are unable to advocate for other options in Tibet’s repressive environment;
- ❖ Students are at risk of **losing their mother tongue** and connection to their cultural identity;
- ❖ China’s boarding school policy is **discriminatory**: it targets Tibetans and other “ethnic minorities,” while the rate of Chinese students in boarding schools is much lower, even in rural areas;
- ❖ Researchers have shown Tibetan boarding school students to be experiencing **great emotional and psychological distress**, including extreme feelings of loneliness and isolation, as a result of being separated from their families, communities, and culture.

In addition, a mandatory system of colonial boarding **preschools for children aged four to six** is operating across Tibet.<sup>6</sup> Eyewitnesses report that children in many rural areas are compelled to live in residential preschools for at least five days a week, returning home to their parents only on weekends. Dr. Gyal Lo, a Tibetan educational sociologist who defected from China at the end of 2020, has personally visited more than 50 such preschools and estimates that at least 100,000 Tibetan children are living in these institutions. However, there appear to be virtually no official sources of information about residential preschools in Tibet, so the full number of boarding preschools and children living in them is unknown.<sup>7</sup>

The boarding preschool system in Tibet creates great risks for Tibetan families and communities, and violates numerous provisions of international human rights law. It causes social and emotional hardship, robs parents of the right to decide the course of their child’s education, and bars Tibetan children from accessing their language, culture, and religion. Over the long term, this system poses a dire threat to the survival of Tibetans’ distinct linguistic and cultural identity.

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<sup>5</sup> Available at: <https://tibetaction.net/campaigns/colonialboardingschools>

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<sup>7</sup> Urban day schools with a similar colonial curriculum – which have been fast-tracked in the Tibet Autonomous Region and more recently in eastern Tibet – appear prominently in state media articles, but a comprehensive search of Chinese academic databases and media outlets yielded only fleeting references to boarding preschools in Tibet. Social media accounts of schools with both primary and preschool mention the preschools extremely rarely, if ever.



**Tibet Action Institute**

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❖ Human Rights Watch

- [China's "Bilingual Education" policy in Tibet](#)
- [China: New Evidence of Mass DNA Collection in Tibet](#)

❖ Citizen Lab

- [Mass DN Collection in the Tibet Autonomous Region from 2016-2022](#)

❖ State Council of China

- 2015 “[Decision on Ethnic Education](#)” explicitly called on officials to “strengthen boarding school construction” in minority regions so as to ensure that “children of all ethnic minorities will live in a school, study in a school, and grow up in a school.”
- 2012 “[Opinions Regulating Rural Compulsory Education School Layout Adjustment](#),” said “compulsory education schools in rural areas should ensure that students can go to nearby schools. Students in grades one to three of rural primary schools do not board in principle, and go to school nearby.”