



09th October 2017

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Mr. Filippo Grandi
94 Rue Montbrillant
1202 Geneva

In view of the aggravating situation of Tibetan refugees in Switzerland, the undersigned Tibet-organizations urgently appeal to you to facilitate a solution to their desperate situation.

Your Excellency Mr. Filippo Grandi

Since China's annexation of Tibet in the 1950s, there has been ever increasing repression. Tibetans have become a minority in their own country. Numerous measures aim at discrimination and forced assimilation of Tibetans, so that the Dalai Lama speaks of "Cultural Genocide". Today, there are around 7,500 Tibetans living in Switzerland, who have entered this country as refugees in three waves: in 1959, 1980, and since 2008 continuously until now. While they were initially welcomed and praised as "model immigrants", the Swiss State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) has meanwhile dramatically changed its practices.

Refugees are no longer recorded with "Tibet" as their country of origin, but are treated as Chinese citizens. Meanwhile, around 300 Tibetans, some of them living here for considerable time, have received their expulsion order. SEM believes that they cannot reliably prove their origin from Tibet, but have entered Switzerland from a safe transit country like Nepal or India. These countries have not signed the Geneva Convention on Refugees. Expelling the Tibetans to Tibet in the Peoples' Republic of China is prohibited by Swiss law. Therefore, after rejection of refugee status, these Tibetans live here in miserable conditions, relying on emergency help. It is virtually impossible for them to obtain documents such as birth certificates in Tibet proving their origin. As well, India and Nepal refuse issuing any identity documents to them. Therefore these Tibetans are unable to leave Switzerland and are blocked in "no man's land".

Recently media reported about two expulsions from Switzerland: a young woman was expelled to Nepal, where she was immediately arrested and has been imprisoned under inhuman conditions; and a male Tibetan was expelled just shortly before his partner gave birth to their child in Switzerland. These events have led to serious anxiety in the Tibetan Community in Switzerland. In view of the desperate situation, one Tibetan man committed suicide in September. In his farewell letter, he complains about the negative attitude of SEM and demands ending the expulsions.

The Tibetan organizations have sent an urgent appeal to the Head of the Swiss Department of Justice and Police, Federal Councilor Simonetta Sommaruga, to reconsider the decisions for expulsion.

The organizations are in serious doubt whether those Tibetans who return voluntarily enjoy sufficient protection from arbitrary arrest. Mrs Sommaruga was asked to review and strengthen, if necessary, all measures for their protection.

In parallel, an interpellation from members of the Parliamentarian Group for Tibet in the Swiss National Parliament was filed on 29th September 2017.

Your Excellency, Mr. Grandi: we, the undersigned, appeal to you for support of our initiatives in Switzerland and help us raising attention to our worries and demands. Please also urge the receiving countries such as India and Nepal to provide adequate protection for refugees returning voluntarily against arbitrary arrest and inhuman treatment.

With high regards and respect



Tenzin Nyingbu, President of the Tibetan Community in Switzerland and Liechtenstein, TCSL



Thomas Büchli, President of the Swiss-Tibetan Friendship Association, STFA



Ms. Palmo Brunner, Co-President of the Tibetan Youth Association in Europe, TYAE



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