

China: UN experts alarmed by separation of 1 million Tibetan children from families and forced assimilation at residential schools

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GENEVA (6 February 2023) – Around a million children of the Tibetan minority were being affected by Chinese government policies aimed at assimilating Tibetan people culturally, religiously and linguistically through a residential school system, UN experts* warned today.

“We are very disturbed that in recent years the residential school system for Tibetan children appears to act as a mandatory large-scale programme intended to assimilate Tibetans into majority Han culture, contrary to international human rights standards,” the experts said.

In residential schools, the educational content and environment is built around majority Han culture, with textbook content reflecting almost solely the lived experience of Han students. Children of the Tibetan minority are forced to complete a ‘compulsory education’ curriculum in

“As a result, Tibetan children are losing their facility with their native language and the ability to communicate easily with their parents and grandparents in the Tibetan language, which contributes to their assimilation and erosion of their identity” the experts said.

They raised concerns about a reported substantial increase in the number of residential schools operating in and outside of the Tibet Autonomous Region and the number of Tibetan children living in them.

While residential schools exist in other parts of China, their share in areas populated by the Tibetan minority is much higher, and this percentage has been increasing in recent years. While on the national level the percentage of boarding students is more than 20%, information received point to the vast majority of Tibetan children in residential schools, almost one million children in total.

“This increase in the number of boarding Tibetan students is achieved by the closure of rural schools in areas which tend to be populated by Tibetans, and their replacement by township or county-level schools which almost exclusively use Putonghua in teaching and communications, and usually requiring children to board,” the experts said. “Many of those residential schools are situated far from the family homes of students boarding in them.”

“We are alarmed by what appears to be a policy of forced assimilation of the Tibetan identity into the dominant Han-Chinese majority, through a series of oppressive actions against Tibetan educational, religious and linguistic institutions,” the experts said.

UN experts said the policies run contrary to the prohibition of discrimination and the rights to education, linguistic and cultural rights, freedom of religion or belief and other minority rights of the Tibetan people.

“This is a reversal of policies which were more inclusive or accommodating in some respects,” the experts said.

In August 2021, the Central Conference on Ethnic Affairs called on all ethnic groups to be guided to always place the interests of the Chinese nation above all else.

education are persecuted,” the UN experts said.

The experts sent a **communication** to the Government of China on 11 November 2022 and remain in contact with the authorities regarding the issue.

*The experts: Mr. Fernand de Varennes, **UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues**; Ms. Farida Shaheed, **Special Rapporteur on the right to education**, Alexandra Xanthaki, **Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights**

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UN Human Rights, country page: **China**

For inquiries and **media requests**, please contact: **hrc-sr-minorityissues@un.org**

For media enquiries regarding other UN independent experts, please contact Maya Derouaz (**maya.derouaz@un.org**)
dharisha.indraguptha@un.org)

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