



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

### **Written statement\* submitted by Jubilee Campaign, a non- governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[1 February 2021]

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\* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



## **China Violates the Convention on the Rights of the Child by Persecuting Children of Faith**

Jubilee Campaign would like to raise to the Council's attention to China's repeated violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which it formally ratified 29 years ago, on 2 March 1992. In 2013, following China's 20th CRC ratification anniversary, the Committee on the Rights of the Child urged the government of China to "take all necessary measures" to "effectively guarantee the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion for those under 18", specifically with regards to the Uyghur, Falun Gong, and Tibetan Buddhist minority groups.<sup>1</sup> Since 2013, however, China has only expanded its persecution of these religious minority communities, and with the implementation of the 2018 Regulations on Religious Affairs, such persecution and religious restrictions were imposed on the nation's youngest citizens.

Now, China is two years late in submitting its state report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and as next year marks the 30th anniversary of China's ratification of the Convention, it is imperative that China repeal all legislations and practices that are incompatible with the right of the child to freedom of religion or belief.

This submission will discuss the major religious freedom violations that children of the Uyghur, Tibetan Buddhist, and Christian communities – as well as children of Falun Gong practitioners – are subjected to in the People's Republic of China.

### **Uyghur Children**

The Chinese government has long conflated Uyghur and other Muslim religious practice with acts of extremism, terrorism, and separatism. Since 2014, Uyghur and Muslim parents and guardians in Hotan, Kashgar, and Aksu prefectures of Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, China (Xinjiang) were discouraged from including their children in religious activities.<sup>2</sup> In 2016, however, restrictions on religious practice for children in Xinjiang were officially codified in regional legislation that prohibited attempts to "organise, lure or force minors into attending religious activities" or "abet, coerce, attract, or tolerate minors' participation in terrorism, extremism, and underground scripture studies."<sup>3</sup> Anti-religious regulations have also been imposed on teachers and school employees in Xinjiang, who are often forced to sign a pledge abstaining from holding religious activities or encouraging their students to participate in religious activities.

One Aksu, Xinjiang government official informed Radio Free Asia that if a minor prays, takes part in fasting, practices or studies religion, or visits underground houses of worship, he or she may be charged with committing a crime. Acts such as wearing religious clothing and headscarves and fasting for Ramadan are also punishable. The official reported that the Communist Party of China's excuse for such restrictions is that children lack "sound judgement" and a "sense of self control" and could therefore be easily manipulated into practicing a faith.<sup>4</sup>

### **Christian Children**

Christian children not only face persecution for their own faith, but they are also targeted for persecution in response to their parents' beliefs as well. In 2018, 13-year-old W. was prohibited from participating in a school festival performance because he was Christian.<sup>5</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of China, adopted by the Committee at its sixty-fourth session (16 September – 4 October 2013), CRC/C/CHN/CO/3-4, 29 October 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Radio Free Asia, "China's new law targets Muslim children for 'correction'", 21 October 2016.

<sup>3</sup> South China Morning Post, "China's new rules for Xinjiang ban parents from encouraging or forcing children into religion", 12 October 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Supra note 2.

<sup>5</sup> Bitter Winter, "Young Christian Banned from Celebration in School", 27 May 2018.

2019, deacon Wang Xinguang of Three-Self Church was threatened that if he chose to continue his religious worship and leadership, his children would face major obstacles in their future.<sup>6</sup> In 2020, 20-year-old Christian David Guan revealed that when he was little, authorities would threaten his safety in attempts to force his father to renounce Christianity.<sup>7</sup>

Since 2017, there have been myriad reported incidents in which local authorities post regulations prohibiting children under the age of 18 from entering churches and participating in religious activities such as church camps and worship. Similar directives have been posted across school and university campuses which state that “faith-related activities, information, and symbols” are disallowed.<sup>8</sup> Teachers have been forced to sign pledges promising that they will not hold personal religious beliefs, and that they will “promote atheism”.<sup>9</sup> Parents in Wenzhou, Zhejiang province reported that they had received letters from their children’s schools that they were required to sign to guarantee refraining from allowing their children to visit “religious venues for scripture study classes or other theological training.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Tibetan Buddhist Children**

Throughout various regions in the Tibet Autonomous Region, China (Tibet), municipal governments have prohibited Tibetan Buddhist children from taking part in religious education and practice. In 2018, the Nangchen County Party Committee United Front Department issued a set of regulations which misrepresent Tibetan Buddhism and language learning as harmful and threatening to “the harmonious stability of the religious sphere” and prohibit Tibetan Buddhist educational classes from being held in various monasteries across Tibet.<sup>11</sup> The Nangchen regulations marked the first direct regulation document from the Communist Party towards Tibetan Buddhism for the purpose of repressing religious freedom; for years prior, religious restrictions in Tibet were usually imposed by schools or education bureaus. For example, in 2017 and 2018, two schools in Tibet urged parents to ensure that their children abstained from “superstitious or religious activity” and asserted that “if your children miss any days of school, and are later found to have been secretly taken to a monastery or religious festival, your family will be reported directly to the city education bureau.”<sup>12</sup>

Many local governments in the Tibet Autonomous Region have instigated a gradual shift away from teaching Tibetan language in schools and towards “Chinese-medium teaching”; many elementary, middle, and high schools in Tibet’s urban areas began teaching Chinese language while placing negligible emphasis on teaching Tibetan language to students.<sup>13</sup> One Tibetan individual from Lhasa revealed that “if it succeeds, it is not difficult to foresee that Tibetan religion, culture, consciousness and identity will become Sinicized.”

### **Children of Falun Gong Practitioners**

Children of Falun Gong practitioners have had to keep their families’ spiritual affiliation a secret for fear of being expelled from school or being harassed by schoolmates. Some students have been encouraged to slander and defame their classmates who are outed as either being a Falun Gong member or having parents that are Falun Gong practitioners.<sup>14</sup> One girl, Y., reported that her classmate told her she should be turned in for having a mother who

<sup>6</sup> Piao Junying, “You Shall Have No God Before Marx and Lenin”, Bitter Winter, 22 January 2019.

<sup>7</sup> ChinaAid, “Christian man writes letter regarding family’s persecution”, 27 August 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Yang Fan and Qiao Long, “China Makes Teachers, Medical Professionals Pledge Not to Follow Any Religion”, Radio Free Asia, 26 September 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Tang Wanming, “State Ensures that Children Stay off Religion on Holidays”, Bitter Winter, 25 August 2019.

<sup>11</sup> F Department document no.121 (2018), Nangchen County Party Committee United Front Department.

<sup>12</sup> Human Rights Watch, “China: Tibetan Children Banned from Classes”, 30 January 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Human Rights Watch, “China’s “Bilingual Education” Policy in Tibet”, March 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Falun Dafa Information Center, “Persecution of family and children”.

practices Falun Gong.<sup>15</sup> Another girl, V., was a Falun Gong practitioner herself; when her boarding school peers found out about her spiritual beliefs, they tried to convince her to commit suicide.<sup>16</sup> When another girl, L., was 16 years old, she was interviewed by Communist Party officials, who filed a complaint for “misbehavior” when she revealed she believed Falun Gong to be a positive practice.<sup>17</sup>

## Recommendations

Jubilee Campaign urges the Human Rights Council, its members and observer states to:

- Condemn China's failure to respect the Convention on the Rights of the Child as it violates article 13, 14, 19 and 29 of the Convention;
- Call on China to remove restrictions on the child's right to freedom of religion or belief.

Jubilee Campaign calls on China to:

- Immediately repeal the 2017 Regulations on Religious Affairs in light of Article 14 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- Immediately cease all practices that pressure children to deny their religious faith in schools and other institutions;
- Respect the recommendations provided by the Committee on the Rights of the Child and begin making steps to implement them by the next Council session;
- Submit their report due to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, whose deadline was in March 2019.

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<sup>15</sup> Friends of Falun Gong, “Yisha’s Story: I Hid My Tears to Keep My Mom’s Arrest Secret”, 30 January 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Friends of Falun Gong, “Vivian’s Story: The Persecution Turned My Friends into Bullies”, 3 January 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Friends of Falun Gong, “Serena’s Story: The Chinese Regime Labeled Me ‘anti-government’ in 3rd Grade”, 15 December 2017.