



**Submission to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee Inquiry into the  
Customs Amendment (Banning Goods Produced by Uyghur Forced Labour) Bill 2020**

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## Introduction

The Australia Tibet Council (ATC) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee Inquiry into the Customs Amendment (Banning Goods Produced by Uyghur Forced Labour) Bill 2020.

ATC is a membership-based community organisation which campaigns for the freedom and human rights of Tibetans. ATC is the largest community of Australians standing in solidarity with the people of Tibet. Our vision is a free Tibet in which Tibetans can determine their own future and freely pursue their cultural, political and economic developments.

The terms of reference of the Inquiry are to examine the proposed Customs Amendment (Banning Goods Produced by Uyghur Forced Labour) Bill 2020.

This submission deals with:

- the urgent need to include Tibet and Tibetans in the Customs Amendment (Banning Goods Produced by Uyghur Forced Labour) Bill 2020.
- the similarities and connections between the systems that are being applied to Uyghurs and Tibetans.
- the forced labour of Tibetans.

## Summary

In both Xinjiang and Tibet the vocational training and labour transfer schemes are top down schemes which rely heavily on centralised administration, quotas, job matching prior to training, and militarized training processes aimed at changing thinking.

“The fact that Tibet and Xinjiang share many of the same social control and securitization mechanisms – in each case introduced under administrations directed by Chen Quanguo – renders adaption of one region’s scheme to the other particularly straightforward.”<sup>1</sup>

The similarities to Xinjiang’s coercive training and labour transfer schemes are abundant: both schemes have the same target group (“rural surplus laborers”); a high powered focus on mobilizing a “reticent” minority group to change their traditional livelihood mode; employ military drill and military-style training management to produce discipline and obedience; emphasize the need to “transform” laborers thinking and identity, and to reform their “backwardness;” teach law and Chinese; aim to weaken the perceived negative influence of religion; prescribe detailed quotas; and put great pressure on officials to achieve program goals. The use by both systems of door-to-door group delivery of labourers with mutual pairing assistance hints at the forced and coercive nature of the employment.

The closed nature of Tibet, even compared to Xinjiang, makes research into these programs difficult and problematic. Given the multiple similarities between the “Vocational Training and Labour Mobility” schemes, the similarities in treatment of both Tibetans and Uyghurs, the similarity between other surveillance and social control programs operating in both regions it can only be concluded that both programs also involve forced labour.

Evidence, and conclusions drawn from that evidence, support the inclusion of Tibet and Tibetans into the proposed Customs Amendment (Banning Goods Produced by Uyghur Forced Labour) Bill 2020.

## **A Short history and background of China's actions in Tibet**

Tibet, an independent Buddhist nation, was invaded by China in 1950.

In 1951 Tibetan Government representatives signed the controversial 17 Point Agreement codifying self-governance if Tibet became part of the People's Republic of China. This document is disputed by Tibetans as it was signed under significant duress.

In 1959 an uprising of Tibetans was brutally suppressed by the Chinese Army (PLA) leading to the flight into exile of the Dalai Lama and approximately 100, 000 Tibetans. In addition, at least 87, 000 Tibetans were killed because of the uprising<sup>2</sup>.

During the 1960s and 1970s Tibetans suffered badly during the Cultural Revolution. Many monasteries were destroyed, with some estimates at more than 6,000<sup>3</sup>.

In this period many Tibetans were made destitute. Between 1960 and 1962 an estimated 340,000 Tibetans died during famines caused by economic reforms introduced by China<sup>4</sup>.

During a brief period under Deng Xiaoping there was a relaxing of the very tight controls however after the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989 tighter restrictions were again imposed.

Significant uprising of Tibetans occurred from 1987-1989 and preceding the Beijing Olympics in 2008.

The Dalai Lama<sup>5</sup> and Central Tibetan Administration (Tibet's Government in exile)<sup>6</sup> estimate that at least 1.2 Million Tibetans have been killed since the invasion.

## **What is Tibet?**

To Tibetans, Tibet includes all three traditional provinces of U-Tsang, Amdo and Kham. When China refers to Tibet, it means Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) which includes only a part of historic Tibet.

Shortly after the Chinese occupation of Tibet in the 1950s, China carved up Tibet into various administrative regions. U-Tsang and part of Kham came under the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), and Amdo and the remaining part of Kham were incorporated into Chinese provinces of Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu and Yunnan.

Tibetan regions in the Chinese provinces are labelled as Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures. Many Tibetan towns incorporated into the Chinese provinces are today widely known by their Chinese names. For instance, Yushu Tibet Autonomous Prefecture in Qinghai province is to the Tibetans Jyekundo in Kham province.

## **Human Rights in Tibet:**

According to the Freedom House, in its Freedom in the World 2020 ranking, Tibet is the second least free place in the world for the fifth consecutive year, next only to Syria<sup>7</sup>.

Human Rights Watch 2021 report identifies ongoing Human Rights abuses by China in Tibet noting that new plans, which include the vocational training and labour transfer policies, involve "...a new milestone for the coercive assimilationist policies of the current leadership"<sup>8</sup>.

While human rights are limited across China, the situation is far worse in Tibet. Arrests, disappearance and torture are common means of suppressing dissent. Prisons in Tibet are filled with

Tibetans detained for acts deemed by the Chinese government as threats to its authority. This could be participating in a protest or leading a community initiative for environmental protection.

Tibetans face intense surveillance in their daily lives. Tibetan towns and cities are dotted with security cameras, police checkpoints, security personnel and CCP informants closely monitoring the daily lives of Tibetans.

Tibet has been the laboratory for China's repressive policies, including those now being practised against the Uyghurs in Xinjiang.

#### Lack of Freedom to impart or receive Information:

China controls the spread of information in Tibet through strict monitoring and censorship over social media, emails and telephone conversations. It also restricts the flow of information out of Tibet. Foreign journalists, tourists and diplomats are rarely allowed entry into Tibet and even they are, they are part of government-sponsored or controlled tours. Recently China has placed an effective ban on tourists and others from travelling to Tibet claiming the environment is too hostile for private tours. The only break of this ban was an organised tour by journalists to a media conference in the Tibetan Capital of Lhasa on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2020 to deny reports of forced labour<sup>9</sup>.

Tibetans send information to organisations and friends and families overseas at great risk of arrest and imprisonment.

#### Lack of Freedom of Religion:

Tibetan Buddhism has flourished in various parts of the world. But sadly it is under severe attack in Chinese-occupied Tibet. Tibetans do not have the freedom to practice their religion meaningfully. They are arrested for merely keeping a photo of the Dalai Lama. Tibetans are told to put portraits of CCP leaders in their homes and also in monasteries, temples and public halls and in certain areas, officials go house to house to check that they are on the altar.

Monks and nuns are routinely forced to undergo 'patriotic education' which involves declaring their loyalty to the Chinese government instead of the Dalai Lama. The number of monks and nuns are also dictated by the Chinese government. In 2016 Chinese authorities demolished most of Larung Gar, Tibet's largest centre for Buddhist studies, banishing about half the population, allowing only 5000 monks and nuns to remain. Similarly, in 2019, around 3500 monks and nuns were forcibly evicted from the Yachen Gar Tibetan Buddhist Institute.

Human Rights watch identified that this repression is still persisting and just days ago reported on January 21<sup>st</sup> 2021 the death of a young Monk from a beating in a police station<sup>10</sup>.

The atheist Chinese government tries to control the ancient Tibetan Buddhist system of reincarnation. In 1995, the Chinese government kidnapped Tibet's 11th Panchen Lama (Tibet's second-highest religious figure after the Dalai Lama) when he was just six years old. China saw the young Panchen Lama as a future threat to its authority given the popularity of the previous Panchen Lama, a vocal critic of Chinese policies, among Tibetans. Six months after the abduction of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the Chinese government appointed its own Panchen Lama in a mockery of the ancient Tibetan Buddhist tradition of reincarnation. Tibetans refer to the Chinese Government's appointee as Panchen Zuma (meaning the fake Panchen). Having kept the Panchen Lama in captivity for the last 25 years, China now plans to interfere in the reincarnation of the next Dalai Lama.

### Attack on Tibetan language and culture:

Tibetans have maintained a unique culture and language before China's invasion in 1950. China's policies ever since have been designed to wipe out Tibet's unique cultural identity. The Tibetan language is the bedrock of Tibetan culture. But it is threatened by China's policy of promoting Mandarin as the primary language in education, government and business.

There has been a concerted effort by the Chinese authorities to lessen the use of Tibetan, with the Chinese language being the medium of instruction in middle and high schools in Tibet and more recently this has been extended to kindergartens and primary schools. This has led to many young Tibetans losing their knowledge of Tibetan language and culture and this policy is part of an overarching program of cultural genocide. Human Rights Watch reports on the impacts of these policies<sup>11</sup>.

### Socio-economic marginalisation and environmental destruction:

Tibet is governed directly by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The nominal head (Chairman) of the Tibet Autonomous Region is Tibetan, but the Party Secretary, the most senior government post with the real power, has always been Han Chinese.

China's exploitation of Tibet's rich natural resources and the massive infrastructure development, including the construction of dams on Tibetan rivers, roads, railways and airports, are a threat to both the people and environment of Tibet. Chinese industrialisation has displaced millions of Tibetan nomads from their ancestral land, opening the land for extraction of resources and ending a traditional way of life that has sustained the Tibetan environment for centuries.

Chinese propaganda emphasises the developments that the government brought to Tibet. However, the economic progress in Tibet is primarily intended to consolidate China's grip over Tibet and enhance its ability to exploit Tibet's natural resources. The real beneficiaries are mostly Chinese migrants and businesses, who have a competitive advantage in urban areas where Mandarin is widely used. The vast majority of Tibetans are left socially and economically marginalised in their own country.

Retired Indian Army Col Vinayak Bhat reported in India Today during 2020 on some of the very recent expansions of this exploitation of both natural resources and labour<sup>12</sup>.

### **Similarities and connections between the treatment of Uyghurs and Tibetans**

Both Tibetans and Uyghurs form distinct social and cultural groupings within China. They each have unique and distinct cultures, strong religious beliefs and are primarily a group of nomadic herders and farmers forming distinct separate identities to their Chinese oppressors.

Chen Quanguo, the chief architect behind the incarceration program in East Turkistan (Xinjiang), was the CCP boss in the Tibet Autonomous Region from 2011 to 2016. It was there he experimented with extreme surveillance measures – such as the “grid management” system and “double linked” households, which he introduced into Xinjiang.

In the absence of strong international opposition, Quanguo was posted to Xinjiang where he took the repressive measures he had learned and implemented in Tibet to an alarming new level, targeting the Uyghurs.

Meanwhile, the intrusive systems of security have continued to persist in Tibet. Tibetans live in a climate of fear, and the Party-State seeks to control every aspect of public and private life.

We now know that those enhanced repressive measures Chen Quanguo put in place in Xinjiang have now been feed back into the Tibetan system. This has been identified by Dr Adrian Zenz in his report for The Jamestown Foundation “Xinjiang’s System of Militarized Vocational Training Comes to Tibet”<sup>13</sup>.

Dr Zenz notes that the scheme of Vocational Training and Labour Transfer introduced to Tibet “shows a disturbing number of close similarities to the system of coercive vocational training and labour transfer established in Xinjiang.”<sup>13</sup>

### **Tibetan Forced Labour**

Dr Zenz’s report, “Xinjiang’s System of Militarized Vocational Training Comes to Tibet”, was created utilising Chinese and TAR Government documents and reports as well as satellite photos. He identified the introduction in 2019 and 2020 of new policies for the systemic, centralized, and large-scale training and transfer of “rural surplus laborers” both within the TAR and to other provinces inside China.

According to Chinese government documents examined by Dr Zenz over half a million rural ‘surplus’ labourers were “trained” using this policy in just the first seven months of 2020.

The labour transfer program requires that labourers are subjected to “military-style vocational training” and indications are that it is supervised by the People’s Armed Police. Documents examined by Dr Zenz show that the scheme is conducted in “strict military style management” to alter thinking, dilute the negative influence of religion and reform backwards thinking.

Under the scheme training, matching and delivery of workers to their work destination is to take place in a centralised system with mandated quotas with strict rewards and punishments for the various levels running the scheme.

Recruitment to these schemes rests with the village-based work teams, an intrusive social control mechanism that had been pioneered in the TAR by Chen Quanguo and taken with him to East Turkmenistan and implemented against Uyghurs destined for internment camps.

In the past there have been smaller scale rural surplus labour training and employment initiatives and between 2005-2010 these programs were increased and spread across the TAR. In 2012 Chamdo region initiated “Military style training for surplus labour force transfer”. This was formalised in the 2016-2020 five year plan and by 2016 Chamdo established 45 vocational training bases. From 2016 the Shannan region implemented “semi-military-style management”.

According to the official government documents examined by Dr Zenz, in March 2019 the TAR issued the “2019-2020 Farmer and Pastoralist Training and Labor Transfer Action Plan” mandating the military style vocational training and labour transfer schemes across the TAR.

Target quotas were implemented in 2020 for both transfers with the TAR at 55,000 and externally to other provinces at 5,000, however there was no detailed policy relating to the external transfers. In the first 7 months of 2020 saw 543,000 surplus laborers trained. Of these 49,000 were transferred inside the TAR and 3,109 to other provinces. Each region has been given a transfer target and it is expected the entire TAR will have been covered by the end of 2020.

From the documents, Dr Zenz was able to identify transfers had occurred to road construction, cleaning, mining, cooking and driving. Mining is of particular concern given the expansion of mineral exploitation by China and the long-term use of forced labour in the sector in the TAR.

A report for India Today in 2020, 'Mineral exploitation, forced labour: How China continues to strangle Tibet'<sup>12</sup>, by retired Indian Army Col. Vinayak Bhat, utilising satellite imagery identified forced labour camps and expanded mineral exploitation utilising forced labour. A year earlier, in a report titled 'China claims it has no 'Gulags', but satellite imagery shows 3 new ones coming up in Tibet'<sup>14</sup> for The Print, he identified 3 re-education camps and securitised Buddhist Monasteries, again utilising satellite imagery.

External transfers are far harder to identify however Dr Zenz was able to identify placements at COFCO China's largest state-owned food processing company. Given the breadth of training identified and the number of labourers being transferred a wider range of factories must be involved in the receiving of Tibetan labourers under this coercive scheme.

The core terminology used in both Xinjiang and the TAR is identical such as "unified matching, unified organising, unified management, unified sending off". In both cases workers are transferred in "group style", subdivided into smaller sub-groups headed by a sub-group leader. The similarities continue with unified processing, batch-style transfers, government involvement, financial incentives for middlemen, participating companies and are based on state-mandated quotas.

Whilst unable, at this early stage of research, to find direct evidence that the TAR labour training and transfer schemes are linked to extrajudicial internment Dr Zenz finds that there are clear elements of coercion during recruitment, training and job matching. This coupled with a centralized and strongly state administered, and supervised transfer process lends strong evidence to the systemic presence of many coercive elements.

There are threats of strict rewards and punishments with each level passing that pressure downwards. These threats all but ensure a level of coercion being applied from the top down.

Dr Zenz found that a further commonality is the central tenant of 'needing to overcome Tibetan and Uyghur resistance to labour transfer' and that this may involve the presence of local cadres to ensure stricter discipline.

Important coercive elements of the program include the use of intrusive social control mechanisms pioneered by Chen Quanguo such as village-based work teams going from door to door similar to practices used in Xinjiang. Another is 'Grid Management' under which neighbourhoods and communities are sub-divided into smaller units for surveillance and control also utilising dedicated administrative and security staff along with "volunteers". This later became the backbone of social control and surveillance in Xinjiang. A further element of this coercive control is the 'double-linked households' system, essentially setting up households to spy and report on one another.

A worrying aspect of the training and labour action plan is its relationship with scheme to get nomads and farmers to hand over their land and herds to cooperatives, they are then either employed by the cooperative or are free to participate in the labour transfer scheme. This is of significant concern as a further method moving Tibetans into the transfer labour scheme and removing them from their traditional lifestyles.

The Vocational Training Schools have a similarly imposing look and build in both Xinjiang and the TAR. The school identified by Dr Zenz, as with those identified by Col. Bhat (Retd), are similar to those



identified in Xinjiang with accommodation blocks separated from other buildings, guard towers and internal fencing significantly higher than perimeter fencing.

Dr Zenz highlights that the policy of vocational training and labour transfers and its numbers are distinct and separate to the coercive vocational training of secondary students and young adults. This is another scheme predicated on forced labour which demands the inclusion of Tibet and Tibetans in the proposed amendment.

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