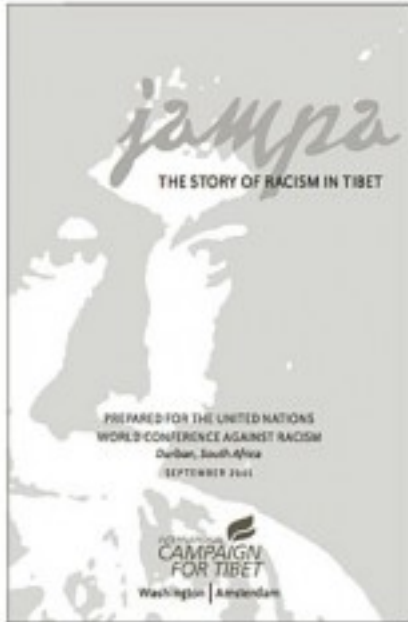


Jampa: The Story of Racism in Tibet

Date : September 1, 2001



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For a Tibetan to raise charges of racism in China today can lead to detention and imprisonment. It is no coincidence that there is not a single NGO in China today that openly speaks of the extensive racism against non-Chinese peoples. Such advocacy could easily run afoul of China's policies prohibiting anything that incites national division or undermines national unity. China still maintains the myth that racism is mainly a Western phenomenon and there have been numerous official pronouncements that racism does not exist in China. It is also shocking that these same official pronouncements often talk in terms of "civilizing" China's minorities. Just last month, Hu Jintao, China's vice president and possible successor to Jiang Zemin, visited Tibet and gave a speech on China's civilizing mission which would "turn from darkness to light, from backwardness to progress, from poverty to affluence." In this statement and in scores of official policies and regulations, there is an open attitude of superiority and paternalism, which is sometimes officially recognized as "Han chauvinism" but which masks a reality that exists in countries all over the world: racism.

One of the greatest results of China's participation in the 2001 United Nations World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) would simply be the acknowledgement that racism is a serious and significant problem in Tibet and China. As Yang Lien-sheng wrote, racism should be "spelled out in order to be dispelled."

What is needed in China is a mass educational initiative to dispel widespread notions of Han Chinese superiority and minority inferiority. While it is official government policy that all peoples in China are equal and discrimination is prohibited, what is occurring in China today is massive denial of tragic proportions. China's laws and policies are in dire need of revision to remove the pervasive paternalism and inferences of superiority that lead to thousands of acts of discrimination day in and day out.