

JAMES P. MCGOVERN, Massachusetts  
Co-Chairman



JOSEPH R. PITTS, Pennsylvania  
Co-Chairman

One Hundred and Fourteenth Congress  
**Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission**

October 19, 2016

His Excellency Cui Tiankai  
The Ambassador of the People's Republic of China in the United States of America  
3505 International Place NW  
Washington, DC 20008

Dear Mr. Ambassador:

As Co-Chairs of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, we write to express our deep concern over the demolition of buildings belonging to the Tibetan Buddhist Institute at Larung Gar, and very troubling reports of the forced eviction of at least a thousand religious adherents there and at Yachen Gar. We believe these actions by Chinese authorities clearly violate the religious freedom of the persons affected and the Tibetan community at large. We strongly urge your government to reverse course, stop the demolitions and evictions, rebuild and restore the affected infrastructure, and permit all those people under Chinese jurisdiction who wish to pursue their Buddhist faith to do so without government interference or "guidance."

Earlier this year, in Serta county of Sichuan province, a local government directive was issued ordering a drastic reduction -- from at least 10,000 people to no more than 5,000 -- of the population of the historic Tibetan Buddhist Institute of Larung Gar, one of the world's largest and most prominent monastic institutions. Beginning in July, government workers began demolishing buildings; as of September, an estimated 2,000 dwellings had been removed. Demolitions are expected to continue next year. Those who inhabited the destroyed residences now face eviction from the community. According to one report, 2,000 nuns have already been required to leave Larung Gar and return to their hometowns in other provinces.

Some reports have suggested that the local government directive was prompted by concerns with overcrowding and fire risks. But if such concerns exist, they do not justify a drastic strategy of demolition and expulsion. Instead, authorities should negotiate any needed structural or other improvements with Larung Gar leaders, or allow the building of more monasteries.

At Yachen Gar, another major monastic community in Pelyul county in Sichuan, since last April as many as 1,000 nuns have been compelled to leave the institution and return to their homes in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR). These evictions were not carried out by local authorities, but by officials of the TAR, who reportedly pressured the families of the nuns with severe punishments. According to an informed source, the nuns who returned to their family homes in the TAR have been told that they may not join any monastery or nunnery there, or carry out public religious rituals or practices.

Mr. Ambassador, the right to freedom of religious belief is recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and under article 36 of the Chinese constitution. In keeping with these provisions, we strongly urge the central government to investigate the actions of the authorities who have demolished religious buildings, expelled practitioners, and imposed restrictions on religious belief and practice; order the reversal of these misguided policies; provide reparations for the damage caused to date; and simply allow people to practice their faith in peace. As Co-Chairs of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, we will continue to closely monitor both the situation at these monasteries and the respect of religious freedom for the Tibetan and Chinese peoples, as this is a value deeply cherished by U.S. citizens and institutions.

Thank you for your attention to this highly sensitive and deeply troubling matter.

Sincerely,

James P. McGovern, M.C.  
Co-Chair, TLHRC

Joseph R. Pitts, M.C.  
Co-Chair, TLHRC