

# STAND UP FOR TIBET: Tibet Lobby 2024

## Ask 2: Urge China to end the residential boarding schools policy in Tibet

Call on the UK government to urge China to end the residential boarding schools and pre-schools policy in Tibet, which has seen almost one million Tibetan children between the ages of four and 18 separated from their families. Allow Tibetans to establish Tibetan-language schools and end policies restricting the use of Tibetan in the education system.

### Background – The residential boarding schools policy

According to findings by the Tibet Action Institute, nearly one million children between the ages of four and 18 have been placed in residential boarding schools and pre-schools, separated from their families and communities and placed in a highly propagandised school environment.

Around 800,000 Tibetan students between the ages of six and 18 - or 78% of all Tibetans in this age category - are now in residential schools, where they only return home during half term. An additional 100,000 children aged four or five are estimated to be living in boarding preschools for at least five days in a week. In practice, the long travel distances mean they return home even less than this.

In these schools, Tibetan children are forbidden from practising their religion, taught mainly in Chinese, and subjected to intense political indoctrination. Testimonies from Tibetans who have been placed in this boarding schools system suggest that severe psychological harm is being inflicted on both Tibetan children and parents. It has also prompted fears among Tibetans that their language, culture and way of life are being systematically eradicated. In the words of one former boarding school student: "Our teachers drove us to hate our heritage, our elders, even our parents... We felt ashamed of our cultural background."

Children are forced into this centralised boarding school system because the Chinese Communist Party eliminates all alternatives: Tibetan-language schools across Tibet are being closed down or demolished and monasteries – traditionally centres of learning – have been forbidden from giving Tibetan language classes to the lay community. Parents also face threats and intimidation to send their children to these schools.

The UK government must use its influence to push for China to heed the recommendations of UN human rights experts and halt the residential boarding schools and pre-schools policy in Tibet. Furthermore, it must allow Tibetans to establish Tibetan-language schools and end policies restricting the use of Tibetan in the education system.

## Statements by UN bodies and other governments

The residential boarding school policy has already attracted international criticism from governments and leading human rights experts. This is a short summary of key statements:

- June 2023 - the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) called on the Chinese authorities to “Abolish the coerced residential (boarding) school system imposed on Tibetan girls and authorize the establishment of and subsidize private Tibetan schools.” It told China to “Ensure that girls and women belonging to the ethnic minorities have access to instruction in their mother tongue... such as Tibetan”. They also called on China to “reverse the closure of schools providing instruction in minority languages.”
- March 2023 - the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) called on China to “immediately abolish the coerced residential (boarding) school system imposed on Tibetan children, as well as allowing private Tibetan schools to be established.” CESCR stated that Tibetans “continue to face severe restrictions in the realization of their right to take part in cultural life, including the right to use and teach minority languages, history, and culture” and called on China to “ensure that Mandarin is not the only language allowed as the language of instruction [in Tibetan schools].”
- November 2022 - a group of UN Special Rapporteurs (human rights experts) stated that the residential school system was part of a “large-scale campaign [by the Chinese authorities] to assimilate Tibetan culture and language”. They noted the “substantial increase in the number of residential schools operating in Tibet and in the number of Tibetan children living in them,” as well as that preschools in Tibet are required to operate in Mandarin Chinese despite Chinese government claims to the contrary.
- May 2022 - Michelle Bachalet, the then UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, raised education policies during her visit to China that month and stressed “the importance of children learning in their own language and culture in the setting of their families or communities.”

## All-Party Parliamentary Group for Tibet

The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Tibet (APPGT) exists “to put pressure on His Majesty’s Government to encourage negotiations between the Chinese Government and representatives of the Tibetan Government in exile, whilst recognising that Tibet is an occupied country which had independent links with Britain.”

By joining the group, MPs can help foster a strong parliamentary voice that speaks out on human rights issues in Tibet and can continue this crucial work in 2019.

## Detailed recommendations

- Abolish the residential boarding school and pre-school system.
- Authorise the establishment of private Tibetan-language schools.

- Halt all policies that prevent Tibetan children from learning their mother tongue, including the closure of Tibetan schools, harassment and arrest of teachers and restrictions on monasteries providing Tibetan language classes.