

Statement of Palden Gyal President of International Tibetan Media Organization.

Before a Joint Shadow Hearing Hosted by the Ranking Members of the Select Committee on the Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party and the Congressional-Executive Commission on China.

Tuesday, September 15, 2026

Testimony on China's Forced Assimilation in Tibet

Representatives Khanna and McGovern, Ranking Members of the House Select Committee on the Strategic Competition Between the United States and the CCP and of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, thank you for inviting me to speak today.

My name is Palden Gyal. I am President of the International Tibetan Media Organization. Before this, I spent 27 years at Radio Free Asia in Washington, D.C., and five years at the Tibet Information Network in London. For more than three decades, I have reported on Chinese policy toward Tibet and on the daily lives of the Tibetan people.

A Systematic Campaign against Tibetan Identity

Since taking control of Tibet, the CCP has used many tactics to erase Tibetan identity. I know this firsthand, having been born in Tibet and lived there until I was 20, when I escaped into exile.

During a brief opening in the 1980s, Tibetans worked hard to preserve their heritage. By the 1990s, the CCP saw that Tibetan language and traditions kept the Tibetan spirit alive, so it began targeting monasteries and schools directly.

In 1996, Beijing launched its "Patriotic Education" campaign, forcing monks, nuns, and students to accept Chinese rule and the Party's version of history. Work teams entered monasteries daily to carry out indoctrination. Monks and nuns are forced to recognize Beijing's chosen Panchen Lama, and denounce His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Tibetans have never stopped resisting. Major protests broke out in the late 1980s and in 2008. More than 170 Tibetans have set themselves on fire to protest Chinese repression. Loga Rangzen, a Tibetan American, was the latest, setting himself on fire outside the United Nations building in New York this July 2.

A New Law, A New Threat

On March 12, China's National People's Congress passed a sweeping new law—the 65-article "Ethnic Unity and Progress Promotion Law"—effective July 1. It pressures Tibetans to give up their language, religion, and traditions and assimilate into mainstream Chinese culture, makes Chinese the primary language of instruction, and expands the state boarding school system.

China keeps tight control over information coming out of Tibet. Independent journalists are not allowed in. This matters for human rights. Without outside observers, the government can hide

abuses. It also gets to decide what story the world hears. That is why restoring Tibetan-language broadcasts by Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Asia (RFA) is so important.

On September 24, Xi Jinping will visit Washington seeking better relations with the US. But in Tibet, Beijing is accelerating its campaign to erase Tibetan culture under the misleading banner of "ethnic unity."

Boarding Schools and the Loss of Language

What is happening today is, in some ways, more dangerous than the Cultural Revolution. The CCP is deliberately cutting generational ties to force complete assimilation. Starting in kindergarten, Chinese is the only language of instruction and nearly one million Tibetan children have been taken from their families and placed in state-run boarding schools.

Just days ago, an 87-year-old grandmother in Tibet told me: "My heart is warm because His Holiness the Dalai Lama is still alive. But I am deeply saddened because my grandchildren speak to me only in Chinese. I cannot understand them, and we cannot talk."

Her words show how quickly the Tibetan language is disappearing. Losing it means losing an ancient civilization.

China's Ethnic Unity Law doesn't just apply inside China—it applies to citizens of other countries. Article 63 says China can prosecute anyone, anywhere, for "undermining ethnic unity." This means Tibetans, Uyghurs, Mongolians, or any American who simply supports their rights could be prosecuted.

Call to Action

I know for certain that any action undertaken by the United States impacts the people of Tibet. Therefore, I would like to make the following recommendations for the US to hold the Chinese government accountable and stand with the Tibetan people in defense of their fundamental rights—these will be a powerful message to Xi Jinping when he visits Washington later this month.

I urge Congress to pass the recently introduced Assuring the Future of Tibet Act (AFTA), which affirmed Tibet's future must be decided by the Tibetan people themselves.

I urge President Trump to directly raise Tibet in his meeting with Xi Jinping, urging him to respect Tibetan human rights and religious freedom and to resume dialogue with His Holiness the Dalai Lama and his representatives.

Thank you.