



# Broken promises

Human rights violations in Tibet since China  
was awarded the 2008 Olympic Games



## Tibet

Before the Chinese occupation in 1949, Tibet comprised three provinces known as U-Tsang, Amdo and Kham. Tibet Watch uses the term Tibet to refer to these three areas. Nowadays, when the Chinese refer to 'Tibet', they mean the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), which was established in 1965. This comprises all of what Tibetans call U-Tsang and parts of Kham. The traditional Tibetan areas of Amdo and the rest of Kham were incorporated into the Chinese Provinces of Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan, and Yunnan. Within these Chinese Provinces there are Tibetan areas divided into various Prefectures subdivided into Counties or district level administrative areas.

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Tibet Watch was established in 2006 as a research and education charity (Registered Charity Number 1114404). Tibet Watch gathers, analyses and disseminates the most up to date information available about human rights, environmental, economic, social and cultural issues in Tibet.



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## Human rights violations in Tibet since China was awarded the 2008 Olympic Games

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*Broken promises* documents the extent of China's broken Olympic promises made the IOC and the international community. Whilst the people of Tibet continue to live in a culture of fear under Chinese military occupation, the Chinese government has treated the IOC, and its Olympic Charter, with contempt.

Having promised to introduce, and promote, human rights and freedom of the international press to report from China in the run up to and during the 2008 Beijing Games, the Chinese government has instead continued to censure and intimidate foreign journalists: the FCCC Report in 2007 lists more than 180 violations of Chinese regulations stating foreign journalists may travel freely and interview anyone who consents; a year later, in March 2008, the FCCC was informed of 50 violations while seeking to cover unrest in Tibetan communities<sup>1</sup>.

In addition, the Chinese government's systematic abuses of Tibet and its people continue to violate the Chinese Constitution and international human rights law, as well as the spirit of the Olympic Games.

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# Executive summary

“(We) urged the Chinese government to improve, as soon as possible, their record on human rights ... if either the security, logistics or human rights are not acted upon to our satisfaction then we will act.”

Jacques Rogge, the IOC President, BBC Hardtalk, 24 April 2002.

“(The Beijing Games would) improve all facets of life in China, including education, health and human rights.”

Wang Wei, President of the Beijing Bid Committee

Seven years ago, on 13 July 2001, the Chinese government was triumphant when Beijing won the award of hosting the 2008 Olympic Games. The international kudos of hosting an Olympic Games is immense, as are the potential profits. But the selection of Beijing was controversial, especially in light of China's human rights record both within China itself, and in Tibet, which China has occupied since 1950. Upon being awarded the 2008 Olympics, the Chinese government swiftly made a number of promises regarding the promotion of human rights across China for the seven years leading up to the Beijing Olympics, as well as promising freedom of movement and access for the thousands of journalists who would be in China covering the Olympics in Beijing before and during August 2008.

The head of the 2001 Beijing Olympic Games bidding committee, Wang Wei, promised that being awarded the 2008 Games would “enhance all social conditions, including education, health and human rights”<sup>2</sup> in China.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) claimed that awarding Beijing the Olympics would lead to improvements in human rights across China. “Some people say, because of serious human rights issues, ‘We close the door and say no [to China],’” said Francois Carrard, IOC Executive Director, on 13 July 2001. “The other way is to bet on openness ... we are taking the bet that seven years from now we will see many changes [in China],” he added.

Seven years later, in the run up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics, this **Tibet Watch** report examines the reality of China's Olympic promises. Focusing exclusively on human rights in Tibet, this report reveals how, contrary to improving its human rights record, China has systematically continued to violate cultural, religious, educational, and political rights in Tibet since it was awarded the Games in 2001. Today, following the uprising in March April 2008, thousands of Tibetans remain imprisoned in Chinese administered detention, religious restrictions have intensified, and peaceful protests have been brutally crushed. Tibetans are living in a culture of fear in their own country, whilst being deprived of education and development opportunities by the Chinese regime.

By analysing up-to-date statistics and Chinese laws, policies and official statements, as well as corroborated eye-witness accounts from inside Tibet, this report details the nature and intensity of human rights abuses in Tibet over the last seven years. These abuses culminated in a mass violent crackdown in March 2008, when protests against the Chinese occupation erupted in the Tibetan capital, Lhasa. This report examines the March 2008 protests, including the international protests that followed on from the protests across Tibet.

These international protests blighted the controversial 21-country tour of the Beijing Olympic torch, which relayed through the Tibetan capital, Lhasa, on 21 June 2008.

*Broken promises* documents the extent of China's broken Olympic promises as regards the people of Tibet, the IOC and the international community. Whilst the people of Tibet continue to live in a culture of fear under Chinese military occupation, the Chinese government has treated the IOC, and its Olympic Charter, with contempt. Having promised to introduce, and promote, human rights and freedom of the international press to report from China before and after the 2008 Beijing Games, the Chinese government has instead continued to censor and intimidate foreign journalists. In addition, the Chinese government's systematic abuses of Tibet and its people continue to violate the Chinese Constitution and international human rights law, as well as the spirit of the Olympic Games.

# China's Olympic promises

China was awarded the Beijing Olympics in July 2001, having committed itself to holding 'A People's Olympics'<sup>3</sup>, that would promote Chinese culture and heritage, and awareness of national solidarity alongside the protection of the rights of minority nationalities in China. Wang Wei, President of the Beijing Bid Committee, – the team, which bid for the Olympics on behalf of the Chinese government – stated the Chinese government was also committing itself to permitting peaceful demonstrations in China.<sup>4</sup> Article 35 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China (PRC) guarantees, 'Freedom of expression, of the press, of assembly, of association, of procession and of demonstration.'

China's tainted human rights record, both in China and in Tibet, was the main controversy of Beijing being awarded the 2008 Olympics. There was also widespread concern about the freedom of the international press to report from China during the Olympic Games. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) is bound by the Olympic Charter, which does not specifically refer to freedom of the press, only to the principle of taking all necessary steps 'in order to ensure the fullest coverage by the different media and the widest possible audience in the world for the Olympic Games.'<sup>5</sup> However, on 27 August 2001, the IOC President, Jacques Rogge, assured the international community that "Beijing has signed a Host City Contract with the IOC which provides the condition on the [Beijing] organising committee to give free access to the country for all accredited media."<sup>6</sup>

Eight months later, in March 2002, the Chinese government published its Beijing Olympic Action Plan. The plan included the Chinese government's commitment to improve governance, increase its understanding and administration of law, and raise the quality of law enforcement across China.

On 14 March 2004, the government amended the Constitution of the PRC, adding the provision that 'the state respects and safeguards human rights', thereby providing constitutional protection of human rights for the first time in the history of the People's Republic of China. If this amendment was implemented according to Chinese law and international human rights law, it would significantly improve the human rights of more than 1.3 billion people living in China and Tibet.

Having also committed itself to promoting and protecting freedom of the press to report on the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs published in December 2006 *Regulations on Reporting Activities in China by Foreign Journalists*, which applies to journalists based in China and those travelling to China to report on the Olympics. The Ministry claimed these regulations, which came into force on 1 January 2007 and are scheduled to expire on 17 October 2008, are intended, 'to advance and promote the Olympic Spirit during the Beijing Olympic Games and the Preparatory Period'<sup>7</sup> and refer to reportage of 'the Olympic Games and related matters'.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, Liu Jianchao, claimed the 2006 regulations would not limit foreign journalists to sports coverage. He told a press conference on 1 December 2001 that, in addition to sports, "...we added the phrase 'related matters' which actually expands the scope of foreign journalists for coverage in China into fields including politics, economy and society."<sup>8</sup>

Article 6 of the Regulations states: **'To interview organisations or individuals in China, foreign journalists only need to obtain their prior consent.'** However, Liu Jianchao also stressed that although foreign journalists would not have to apply to local Foreign Affairs Offices for permission to interview locals, they would not be exempt from the 'procedures necessary for all foreign travellers to Western Xinjiang, the Uygur Autonomous Region and the Tibet Autonomous Region.'<sup>9</sup> Such 'procedures' require all foreign journalists to obtain a special permit before travelling to Tibet and Xinjiang, regions where strong separatist sentiment exists. At the time of publication, Beijing-based foreign journalists reported being told they would have to wait up to 20 days after application before being issued with such permits. As final approval for the issuing of such permits rested with the Chinese government, this blatantly gave the Chinese government a loophole to control the international press, despite Beijing having signed a Host City Contract with the IOC guaranteeing free access for accredited media across China.

**The Chinese government signed up to a raft of commitments in order to secure its tenure of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, and in addition amended its constitution to include, for the first time ever, a specific reference to respecting and safeguarding human rights. An examination of facts on the ground in Tibet, however, exposes the reality of these broken promises.**

# Broken promises

## Seven years of escalating repression: Chinese human rights violations in Tibet 2001-2008

China bid for, and won, the Beijing Olympics on the basis that holding the Games would boost its economy, and also enhance 'social conditions' across the country, including education, health and human rights. However, according to the US State Department 2001 *Country Report on China*, **'The Chinese leadership's preoccupation with stability in the face of continued economic and social upheaval fuelled an increase in human rights violations. China's increasingly prominent international profile, symbolised in 2001 by its entry into the World Trade Organisation and by Beijing's successful bid to host the 2008 Olympics, was accompanied by tightened controls on fundamental freedoms.'**<sup>10</sup>

These 'tightened controls on fundamental freedoms' have seriously affected every aspect of life in Tibet over the last seven years, and have also had a huge impact on the freedom of journalists and human rights monitors to report on violations in the Tibet.

### Detention & torture

Since 2001, the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) has confirmed the names of more than 700 Tibetan political prisoners, although, according to ICT, there are likely to be hundreds more Tibetan prisoners whose identities have never been confirmed. During the last few years, the estimated number of Tibetan political prisoners decreased, due to prison sentences expiring, and a widespread culture of fear of protesting against the Chinese regime. However, more than 5000 Tibetans were recently arrested and detained, after protests erupted in the Tibetan capital, Lhasa, in March 2008, and spread across Tibetan provinces of China.<sup>11</sup> (See page 15.)

In November 2005, Manfred Nowak, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment, led a mission to China and Tibet. During his mission Nowak visited several prisons and detention centres in Tibet. He noted that, 'China was amongst the first states to ratify the Convention Against Torture (CAT) in 1988, which requires state parties to take measures for the prevention of torture and to punish every act of torture with appropriately serious penalties.' After interviewing Chinese and Tibetan detainees and prisoners and Chinese officials, Manfred Nowak concluded that 'torture remains widespread in China.'<sup>12</sup>

**Tibet Watch** researchers based in Dharamsala, India, have gathered, and translated testimonies from scores of Tibetans who have been detained and tortured, by the Chinese regime. Because of the difficulties and dangers of gathering data inside Tibet, the majority of these testimonies come from Tibetans who have fled across the border into India, where the Tibetan government-in-exile is based, in Dharamsala, northern India.

On 30 September 2006, Chinese border police intercepted a group of Tibetans attempting to flee across the border from Tibet into India via the Nang Pa La pass. The border police started shooting at the Tibetans, killing at least one person, a nun named Kelsang Namtso.

A 25-year-old Tibetan farmer, Tashi Tenzin, was amongst the approximately 80 Tibetans who were subsequently arrested at Nang Pa La. The Tibetans were all detained in the nearby town of Tashidzong. Tashi Tenzin was then transferred to a detention centre in Shigatse in Tibet, where he was held for the next five months.

**“It was a huge prison with many prisoners. We had only one bowl of rice soup instead of breakfast; but we were prisoners and we had no choice. The worst thing in Shigatse prison was that there were interrogations every day for three weeks, and after every interrogation there would always be beatings and torture. All the [Chinese] officers and prison guards were very evil. Those [evil] prison guards and officers put me in a separate room, and put on the handcuffs. They took my clothes off except my underwear, and tortured me by electricity, slapped me until sometimes I couldn't inhale, and hung me in the air for six or seven hours. They also put my head under water. Afterwards, I could not lie on my bed properly, because of the wounds on my back. The reason they beat and tortured me so harshly was because I wouldn't confess that it was my plan to go to India. But eventually I could not bear such beatings and torture any longer, so I told the truth to the police officer; except I told him that I was going to India for education opportunities and to improve my life, instead of telling him I was going to India because I wanted to see our spiritual leader, His Holiness the Dalai Lama. And after I told him that, they didn't beat me again. Actually I do not know much about human rights in international law, but the way that Chinese officials torture Tibetans is very ugly and out of control, especially in the prisons.”<sup>13</sup>**

The Chinese government initially denied the shootings at Nang Pa La. After video footage of the shootings was released on the internet, the government then claimed the Chinese soldiers had been acting in self-defence, despite the fact the Chinese soldiers were armed, whilst the Tibetans were clearly unarmed.

### **Deaths of Protestors & Prisoners**

Figures on the deaths of Tibetan protesters and prisoners are notoriously difficult to verify, due to the Chinese government's culture of secrecy and misinformation regarding human right violations in Tibet. The only data available is from Novak's report which states that from 1987-2007, at least 60 Tibetans are known to have been killed by the Chinese military after non-violent demonstrations against the Chinese occupation. During the same period, at least 37 Tibetans died in detention as a direct result of torture or inhumane treatment or medical negligence, although the estimated number of deaths in both instances is expected to be significantly higher.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, according to data compiled by the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) of the Tibetan government-in-exile in India, 203 Tibetans were killed by the Chinese military during the March and April 2008 uprising in Tibet.<sup>15</sup>

### **No faith in the state: Religious restrictions and repression in Tibet**

**“The main problem is the inner difficulty of mind. There is a lack of freedom of speech, so other people cannot know what we are really thinking. Although from the outside everything may look good, there is great fear in every Tibetan mind.”<sup>16</sup>**

Monks and nuns are revered in Tibet, where the Buddhist faith and its practice are the foundation of Tibetan national identity. In 1998, China signed the (1966) International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) but has yet to ratify it. The Covenant states the inalienable right of every person to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including religious practices. However, China has subjected Tibetan monks and nuns to severe restrictions regarding their religious practise for decades, and continues to do so. According to testimonies from Tibetan monks and nuns, and investigations by international human rights monitors, including **Tibet Watch**, over the last seven years, Tibetan Buddhist life has been placed firmly in the hands of the Chinese regime that now controls every aspect of religion in Tibet.<sup>17</sup>

The Chinese regime has established, and maintains, a stranglehold on the Buddhist faith in Tibet. Monasteries, and nunneries, which were once home to thousands of monks and nuns now have their numbers severely limited. Religious education, which used to begin at a very early age, now cannot commence until the prospective monk or nun is 18 – and has passed a Chinese administered political exam. Travel between monasteries is severely curtailed. Chinese administered ‘Work Teams’ regularly visit monasteries and nunneries to deliver ‘patriotic education’ compelling monks and nuns to denounce their spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, and to swear allegiance to the Chinese ‘motherland’.<sup>18</sup> Since 2005, patriotic education has been extended and intensified. In addition, the Chinese State Religious Affairs Bureau Order No.5, which was implemented by the State Administration of Religious Affairs on 1 September 2007, has taken religious control to a new level. Under the order, all reincarnated Tibetan living Buddhas are subject to the approval of the Chinese government, which also approves a ‘Training Plan’ for any living Buddha, and thereby retains absolute control over him.

There is no freedom of religion in Tibet.

The Chinese authorities have invested large amounts of money in restoring prominent Tibetan monasteries, presenting a veneer of a thriving religious life that attracts increasing numbers of tourists to Tibet. But the majority of Tibetan monasteries are funded by their local Tibetan communities with some help from overseas. Testimonies from monks and nuns who have fled from Tibet to India expose the suffocating restrictions being imposed on Tibetan Buddhists who refuse to relinquish their faith or their way of life.

W. Dorje, a Tibetan monk, crossed from Tibet to India to attend teachings by the Dalai Lama and was caught by Chinese Public Security personnel whilst en route back to his monastery inside Tibet.

“I was caught at a place called Huachoe in Ngari Prefecture by the Chinese Public Security personnel. I was extremely frightened. They handcuffed one of my hands and connected the other side of the handcuff to the beam of a basketball frame in the police station and left me there overnight. Those police also forced me to throw the photo of His Holiness the Dalai Lama that I brought with me from India, into the toilet. When I refused and kept silent, some of the police were forcing me to eat those photos. I told them that I was a monk over 50 years of age, I did not care what they were going to do with me. I had been to India and attended the teachings of His Holiness and I won’t do anything to dishonour him...”<sup>19</sup>

Such draconian restrictions and repression illustrate the Chinese regime’s continuing determination to wipe Buddhism out of Tibet, despite China having signed up to (though it has not ratified) the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. These restrictions also clearly contravene China’s constitutional commitment to respect and safeguard human rights, as well as its public commitment to ‘intensify [our] efforts to protect human rights’ during the run-up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics.<sup>20</sup>

## Undermining Tibetan Language, Education & Development

‘All persons have therefore the right to express themselves and to create and disseminate their work in the language of their choice, and particularly in their mother tongue; all persons are entitled to quality education and training that fully respect their cultural identity; and all persons have the right to participate in the cultural life of their choice and conduct their own cultural practises.’

Article 5 of the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity

In February 2008, the London-based Free Tibet Campaign published a briefing, *Forked tongue: Tibetan language under attack*,<sup>21</sup> which exposed and detailed the steps the Chinese government has taken in Tibet to deliberately undermine the Tibetan language, and education.

In 2001, the year China was awarded the 2008 Beijing Olympics and promised to protect 'minority nationalities' rights', a Chinese government directive declared that standardised Mandarin was to be taught in schools 'across China' (including Tibet) from the beginning of primary school. This directive was formalised as an amendment to the 1984 [China] Regional National Autonomy Law, and has actively promoted the Chinese government model of a monolingual China. With rare exceptions, children across Tibet are allowed just three years of primary education in Tibetan, before being entirely educated in Mandarin Chinese in all subjects except Tibetan language.

This systematic policy has severely undermined literacy amongst Tibetan children, as they often switch to being educated in Mandarin before having reached a crucial level of literacy in their Tibetan mother-tongue. Consequently, many Tibetans do not complete their primary education, and the rate of illiteracy or semi-literacy amongst Tibetans aged six and upwards is now approximately 49% compared to an average of 13.7% amongst Chinese students.<sup>22</sup> At Lhasa University, the only subject taught in Tibetan is Tibetan language: all other subjects are taught in Mandarin.

"There are few lucrative job prospects for Tibetans who have not been educated in Chinese. Nor is it possible for a student educated in Tibetan to acquire professional qualifications at college or university. There are no relevant courses taught in Tibetan."<sup>23</sup>

**Despite its Olympic promise to protect the rights of minority nationalities, the Chinese government has continued to undermine the teaching and practise of the Tibetan language and culture in Tibet during the last seven years.**

The Chinese regime has also severely curtailed economic development for Tibetans. Although the capital, Lhasa, has been massively developed over the last ten years, Tibetans have not benefited, as wealth is almost exclusively concentrated in the hands of local Chinese residents, many of who received hefty incentives to move to Tibet. Andrew Fischer is a development economist based at the London School of Economics and Political Science, and an authority on Tibet. 'Tibetans are still very much the majority group but Han Chinese migrants have come to dominate the opportunities in the urban economy,' he says.<sup>24</sup>

Illiteracy, massive social exclusion, plus the fact that around 70% of Tibetans work in agriculture, have impoverished Tibetans across the TAR. According to Andrew Fischer, 'despite [occasional] Chinese government assertions that Tibetans had gained from the overall development of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), official statistics showed no improvement in Tibetan education from 2000-2005. Rural illiteracy remained around 45%, urban illiteracy around 41% and the proportion of the Tibetan population with a secondary education and above was approximately 11.5%. Those with a secondary education and above are probably the only Tibetans with a decent degree of Chinese fluency, who can therefore hope to take advantage of urban economic opportunities based on Chinese fluency, Chinese work cultures and connections to Government or business networks in China'.<sup>25</sup> Fischer also highlighted in the *Financial Times* article in March 2008 that Tibetan students at Lhasa University staged a demonstration after only 2 of 100 government jobs went to Tibetan students. Jobs were awarded on the basis of an exam in Chinese.<sup>26</sup>

## Freedom of the press

**"They [foreign journalists] can travel anywhere in China. There will be no restrictions."**

Sun Weija, Olympic Press Chief, Olympics Press Briefing, September 2006.

**"One hundred days before the [Beijing] Olympics – death threats against foreign correspondents and official statements demonizing Western media create a hostile environment for foreign journalists based in China, and for tens of thousands of additional media planning to cover the Games."**

Foreign Correspondents Club of China (FCCC), 30 April 2008.

In 2001, Wang Wei, General Secretary of the Beijing Olympics bid committee stated 'We will give the media complete freedom to report when they come to China.'

However, over the seven years since China secured the 2008 Beijing Olympics, journalists based in China have consistently complained of being harassed, detained and sometimes threatened by the Chinese authorities. In a survey published in 2004, the Foreign Correspondents Club of China (FCCC) stated that, 'the Chinese authorities frequently detain foreign reporters.'

The FCCC represents more than 325 foreign correspondents based in China. Between July 2004-2006, FCCC registered 72 incidents of harassment involving journalists in China working for international media. These included an Associated Press (AP) photographer being clubbed by plainclothes Chinese security personnel in 2004, two BBC journalists being detained and strip-searched in July 2005, and a Radio France Internationale reporter being beaten up, arrested and detained in Guangdong province in October 2005.<sup>27</sup> Incidents of a similar nature were registered by FCCC in 2006.

During 2007 widespread harassment of journalists in China continued, with FCCC registering more than 180 violations of the (2006) Regulations on Reporting Activities in China by Foreign Journalists, which The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs introduced as part of its public commitment to freedom of the press, in order to 'advance and promote the Olympic Spirit.'

Since 14 March 2008, the FCCC has registered more than fifty incidents of harassment of international media attempting to report in Tibetan communities. On 12-13 April 2008, Chinese police stopped a reporter and photographer from Kyodo News (based in Japan) at a checkpoint as the journalists were about to enter the Tibetan city of Ganzi in western Sichuan Province. The policemen insisted they escort the reporter and photographer 'for their own safety', and followed them everywhere – at times in a separate car, at times on foot – whilst they were in Ganzi. The reporter and photographer were also denied access to a Tibetan temple, after being informed that journalists could not enter without a press accreditation pass for the Beijing Olympics – although no passes had been issued at the time.<sup>28</sup>

In yet another incident, police detained Katri Makkonen, a Finnish Broadcasting Corp. correspondent, on 17 March outside the monastery (Labrang) town of Xiahe, in Gansu province, where she was reporting protests. The police demanded to see video footage she held and said: "You don't want to know what will happen if you don't show us the footage".<sup>29</sup>

By 30 April 2008, at least ten foreign correspondents in China had received anonymous death threats, apparently as the result of a campaign run in Chinese state run media and websites alleging media bias in western coverage of Tibetan protests.<sup>30</sup>

To date, foreign correspondents in China continue to be detained, prevented from conducting interviews, searched, and sometimes have their reporting materials confiscated or destroyed. Chinese authorities have intimidated local Chinese sources and staff, and in some cases have ordered them to inform on foreign correspondents' activities.<sup>31</sup> International journalists also filed a large number of complaints with FCCC about obstruction, harassment, detentions, and some physical assaults, whilst attempting to cover the aftermath of the devastating earthquake in Sichuan province in May 2008.

The most controversial leg of the Olympic torch relay was in Lhasa, on 21 June. China's violation of its key Olympic guarantee of free reporting was nowhere more obvious than in its management of what many considered to be the most sensitive leg of the torch relay.

Since the beginning of unrest in March all foreign journalists had been barred from the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) and all Tibetan-populated areas affected by protests. The restriction was a blatant violation of a pledge made by Olympics Press Chief, Sun Weijia, at a press briefing to foreign journalists in September

2006 that 'they (foreign journalists) can travel anywhere. There will be no restrictions'.<sup>32</sup> These restrictions were not lifted for foreign journalists to report freely the arrival of the Olympic Torch in Lhasa. Instead, what the BBC's China Correspondent, James Reynolds, described as a 'closely monitored group' of journalists representing 30 separate news organisations, was allowed to cover the event.

James Reynolds reported 'a staggering security presence' for the arrival of the torch.<sup>33</sup> It was clear that the authorities were only prepared to allow journalists to interview Tibetans who had been hand-picked in advance by the Chinese authorities. **Tibet Watch** had received reports 'that only Tibetans in certain jobs were being allowed to apply for the special permit issued by the authorities to watch the arrival of the torch in Lhasa',<sup>34</sup> and this was corroborated in James Reynolds's BBC report.

Meanwhile, according to Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF), the Chinese regime in Tibet continues to obstruct Tibetan access to free media, by jamming broadcasts such as Radio Free Asia, Voice of America and Voice of Tibet, so they do not reach Tibetans inside Tibet.

**The Chinese authorities have consistently and deliberately violated their 2001 Olympic promise of freedom for international media to report from all parts of China, and are also actively obstructing journalists from travelling to, and reporting from, Tibet.**

# Promises betrayed: Flames of fury – the March and April 2008 protests

**“Repression continues to increase [in Tibet], with numerous, unimaginable and gross violations of human rights, denial of religious freedom and politicalisation of religious issues”**

The Dalai Lama, 10 March 2008

By the end of 2007 it was clear that, despite repeated pledges from the IOC and China that staging the Games in China would inevitably lead to major improvements in the field of human rights in China, the situation in Tibet had actually appreciably worsened. The persistent strengthening of state control over Tibetan Buddhism, together with the increasing marginalisation of Tibetan language, culture and identity (described in the previous chapter) represented a blatant refusal by China to live up to its earlier pledges.

Seven years of increasing abuses, almost entirely ignored by the IOC despite its own solemn pledges, had created a simmering resentment amongst Tibetans both inside and outside Tibet. Such resentment surfaced dramatically, first in Lhasa and then throughout Tibet, in March 2008.

On 10 March 2008, a contingent of approximately 300 monks from Drepung and nearby Sera monastery marched towards Barkhor Street in central Lhasa, in a symbolic protest to commemorate the 1959 uprising, and also to demand the release of six monks who had been arrested the previous October.<sup>35</sup>

Between 50 and 60 of the monks were arrested at roadblocks created by the police in an attempt to stop the protest from growing and spreading to other parts of the city. Tensions in the city escalated over the next few days as thousands of armed police surrounded the city's major monasteries. On March 14 protests erupted in central Lhasa. After years of violent repression, some Tibetans turned on Chinese residents of Lhasa, whilst armed Chinese police reacted brutally towards Tibetans.

## The response inside Tibet

**“[The crowd] started throwing bricks and stones and sticks – anything they could find – at the police station right next to the main square. They turned over a couple of police cars and set fire to them. The Tibetans said to us, ‘Don’t worry, foreigners are welcome – it’s just the Chinese [who are not].’ But we started moving away up the road.”<sup>36</sup>**

The Lhasa riots were undoubtedly violent; however, when the uprising spread outside the Tibetan Autonomous Region into the Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures in the adjacent Chinese provinces, monks and nuns staged spontaneous, but peaceful demonstrations against years of religious repression by the Chinese regime.

These peaceful demonstrations were also violently suppressed, leading to further protests. According to data from **Tibet Watch**, more than 80 Tibetan nuns were detained in Kardze, in Sichuan Province (the Tibetan area of Kham) in May 2008, after a series of peaceful protests. The nuns, several of whom unfurled Tibetan flags in public, and called out the name of the Dalai Lama, were protesting against the violent crackdown that had followed the peaceful religious protests in March. Nunneries across Kardze were subsequently subjected to stringent ‘patriotic education’ campaigns, aimed at coercing the nuns into

denouncing the Dalai Lama.<sup>37</sup> Kardze now has more known political detainees than any other Tibetan county outside of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR).<sup>38</sup>

An eye-witness to one of the Kardze protests, described the Chinese police reaction. “[Chinese] Police has sealed off the area, but bloodstains were still visible on the street. They said [the bloodstains] belonged to the young man, Sergah. The three [Tibetan] nuns and Sergah were beaten to the point where they couldn’t move and then thrown on to a truck as if they were bags of luggage – it is difficult to tell whether they were alive or not.”<sup>39</sup>

After investigating the uprisings in March and April 2008, the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) in Dharamsala, India, confirmed that, to the best of its knowledge, 203 Tibetans had been killed following the Chinese government crackdown on the protests from 10 March-25 April 2008. CTA spokesman, Thupten Samphel, stated that these figures were based on information from six different news sources, including Chinese state media. “We confirm that the actual figure for the dead is 203, the number of injured is more than 1000 and the number of those still detained is more than 5,715” he said.<sup>40</sup>

On 23 April 2008, Steven Marshall, Senior Advisor of the US Congressional-Executive Commission on China<sup>41</sup> addressed the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He spoke about human rights in Tibet and the possibilities of “finding a path to peace.” Marshall, who has documented human rights in Tibet and China for more than 20 years, made a clear distinction between the March 2008 protests and previous uprisings in Tibet, reiterating that the 2008 protests spread far beyond Lhasa and the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and into the Tibetan areas in the Chinese provinces of Qinghai, Gansu and Sichuan. Marshall also noted that the Chinese government, ‘faced with the choice between blaming the protests on the Dalai Lama or acknowledging acute Tibetan dissatisfaction with policies that do not deliver the rights and freedoms under China’s constitution and legal system, the Chinese leadership blamed the Dalai Lama.’

### **Free Tibet! – the international response**

The Lhasa riots, and the ensuing protests across Tibet struck a chord internationally. Huge press coverage of the Tibet protests and China’s ensuing repression produced an outpouring of sympathy for Tibet and frustration at China’s string of broken promises about improving its human rights record in the run up to the Games. There followed a highly visible international response, with marches, petitions and letters to Chinese embassies as well as large-scale pro-Tibet demonstrations throughout the controversial 21-country tour of the Beijing Olympic torch. The torch relay was disrupted by demonstrators in London and Paris, and the route of the torch was also altered and shortened in San Francisco, after tens of thousands of demonstrators took to the streets. These largely peaceful demonstrations highlighted the widespread international outrage over China’s continuing human rights abuses and violations in Tibet.

### **The IOC Response**

For almost seven years, despite its very public commitment in its own Olympic Charter to ‘respect for universal fundamental ethical principles’<sup>42</sup> the International Olympic Committee (IOC) remained utterly silent as human rights abuses continued to be systematically committed in Tibet, as well as in China itself.

The IOC failed to address concerns voiced by local and international human rights organisations, including Tibet Watch, that China was continuing to violate human rights despite having publicly committed itself to intensifying efforts to protect human rights in the run up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics. The IOC also failed in its obligation to address continuing censorship of the international press by China in violation of supposed guarantees for free reporting. The IOC’s failure to address such concerns came despite hundreds of complaints being filed by journalist members of the Foreign Correspondent’s Club of China.

On 10 April 2008, the IOC President, Jacques Rogge, issued a public statement that he claimed 'reiterated the serious concerns and emotions of the IOC about the situation in Tibet. I expressed the hope for a rapid and peaceful resolution of this crisis.'<sup>43</sup> Rogge also called on China to respect its 'moral engagement' to improve human rights, and to provide international media with greater access across China during the period of the Olympic Games. This statement was a clear departure for the IOC, which had previously strenuously avoided referring to human rights issues in China and Tibet. However, the IOC was fiercely critical of widespread public demonstrations against the Olympic torch relays. While this may be explained in the light of their championing the Olympic games, such criticism was unjust: it was the IOC's failure to address well-founded human rights abuses across Tibet that was instrumental in fuelling these demonstrations in the first place.

On 27 June, just days after the Olympic relay in Lhasa, the IOC sent a letter to the Beijing Olympic organisers, in which it referred to the 21 June speech made in Lhasa by Zhang Qingli. The IOC said it, 'regretted the political statements that were made during the closing ceremony of the torch relay in Tibet' and had written to the Beijing Organising Committee of the 2008 Olympic Games (BOCOG) 'to remind them of the need to separate sport and politics and to ask for their support to make sure that such situations do not arise again'. The official response from a Chinese Foreign Spokesman, Liu Jianchao, was that China 'is further striving to stabilise the Tibet region and create a harmonious and stable environment for the Olympic Games.'<sup>44</sup>

# Rekindling the Olympic spirit: conclusion and recommendations

**“If there were no Tibetan issue, the Chinese government would follow their [Olympic] promise very well. But with the Tibetan issue, they will not keep their commitment.”**

Zhan Jiang, Journalism Dean at China Youth University for Political Sciences<sup>45</sup>

Ever since being awarded the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games in 2001, China has been embroiled in controversy regarding its human rights record, especially the systematic deterioration of human rights in Tibet, as well as its unwillingness to permit any degree of genuine press freedom in China and Tibet.

In addition, China has treated its Olympic promises and its commitments to the IOC and the international community with contempt. Human rights continue to be systematically violated in Tibet (as well as throughout China).

The IOC has in turn shown an astounding lack of integrity and courage, refusing to confront China's human rights abuses, consistent abuses of press freedom and all sense of the spirit of the Olympic Games.

In 2001, the IOC took 'a bet' on China improving its human rights record, yet offered no constructive engagement with China on human rights issues when this might have made a real impact. This in turn has seriously tainted the moral authority of the IOC.

After almost six decades of living under Chinese regime rule, 2008 has become a critical juncture for the people of Tibet. The Beijing Olympics are still a rare opportunity for the international community to utilise the true meaning of the Olympic spirit, by addressing China constructively and directly about the crucial changes it needs to make, both for the sake of the people of Tibet, and for the sake of China's own long term stability and security.

## Recommendations

- Immediate and constructive dialogue between the Dalai Lama and the Chinese Government for a resolution of the Tibetan problem.
- China to distinguish between peaceful protesters and rioters and to honour the Chinese Constitution's reference to freedoms of speech and association, and respecting and safeguarding human rights.
- China immediately to ratify the (1966) International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which it signed in 1998.
- China to ensure that its security officials fulfil their obligations under Articles 64(2) and 71(2) of China's Criminal Procedure Law to inform relatives and work places where detainees are held.
- China to permit unrestricted access by diplomats and other international observers to the trials of people charged with protest-related crimes since 10 March.
- China to permit international observers to closely monitor the implementation of its new Regulation on Open Government Information, which came into force on 1 May 2008, with special emphasis on Tibet.
- Immediate readmission of journalists to the TAR and all Tibetan populated areas. Such readmission to be unhindered and without restriction.

- To effect the readmission of independent observers (such as UN monitors) to verify independently conditions in Tibet since the start of protests in March 2008 as well as the readmission of medical bodies such as Red Cross to supply key medical aid to all those injured in TAR and Tibetan-populated areas since 10 March.
- A formal pledge by the government of China to extend, and abide by, the current foreign media reporting regulations, scheduled to expire on 17 October 2008.
- The IOC to undertake a formal review of its commitment to – and the implementation of – freedom of the press during IOC events, including future Olympic Games.

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## Notes

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Tibet was a country the size of Western Europe when Chinese forces invaded in 1950. Since the Chinese occupation, large portions of the country have been absorbed into provinces of the People's Republic of China.

Hundreds of thousands of Tibetans have been executed, imprisoned and tortured and human rights abuses remain widespread. Tibet's unique culture, religion and environment are in danger of being wiped out.

### **Vision**

Tibet Watch is working towards a Tibet where fundamental human rights are assured and where Tibetans exercise their rights to religious, cultural and political freedom and economic opportunity free from fear and discrimination.

### **Mission**

Tibet Watch promotes the human rights of the Tibetan people by providing accurate information about the situation in Tibet, for the purposes of public education, raising awareness of the situation in Tibet and informing international advocacy on behalf of the Tibetan people.

### **Values**

Tibet Watch is independent of all governments, including the Tibetan Government in exile, and all other organisations and groups. It works in close co-operation with Free Tibet Campaign.

We believe in exposing the human rights abuses in Tibet and, by so doing, building worldwide solidarity for the human rights of the Tibetan people to be respected, so that Tibetans will live in freedom.

For more information about Tibet Watch see [www.tibetwatch.org](http://www.tibetwatch.org)

## **Broken Promises**

Human rights violations in Tibet since China was awarded the 2008 Olympic Games

A Tibet Watch report



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