

20 November 2020

Mr Ahmed Shaheed
Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief
c/o Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

*This World Children's Day: Grant every Child in China Every Right by
Lifting the Worship Ban*

Dear Special Rapporteur,

We, the undersigned, are a collection of individuals and organizations that advocate for human rights and religious freedom around the world. We would like to express our respect for your proactive engagement with the United Nations, the most influential international body with respect to promoting and protecting the rights of all humans, regardless of sex, gender, nationality, race, ethnicity, or religion. In that same respect, we also wish to collectively raise to you the issue of China's persistent and egregious violations of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child with regards to the child's right "to freedom of thought, conscience and religion" as outlined in Article 14 Paragraph 1.ⁱ

The Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended the government of China to "take all necessary measures" to "effectively guarantee the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion for those under 18," highlighting unrecognized faiths.ⁱⁱ China, however, has continued to extend its restrictions on the child's right to freedom of religion or belief to all youth under the age of 18 years, thus blatantly disregarding the UN mechanisms and the rights these mechanisms seek to protect.

In February 2018, China officially implemented its 2017 Regulations on Religious Affairs, which enabled and emboldened local government officials to prohibit and even criminalize children's entry into churches, participation in religious activities, and involvement in religious education.ⁱⁱⁱ Young children are forced to sign religious non-belief and non-participation pledges in order to graduate school^{iv}, minors are forcibly driven from church-organized Sunday schools and summer camps^v, and students are forced to attend anti-religious and pro-atheist lessons and programs.^{vi}

In the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, Chinese authorities continue to forcibly separate Uyghur children from their parents, placing children in state institutions where they are denied contact with their family, prohibited from practicing their faith, and stripped of their cultural and linguistic traditions.^{vii} In 2016, the Chinese Communist Party published a set of religious regulations specific to Xinjiang that would call for the punishment of parents that "abet, coerce, attract, or tolerate" their children's participation in "underground scripture studies."^{viii} Such

restrictions also violate Article 14 Paragraph 2 of the CRC, which states “States Parties shall respect the rights and duties of the parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his or her right in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child.”^{ix}

Throughout many various regions in Tibet, local governments have prohibited Tibetan Buddhist children from participating in religious, Buddhist-centered curriculum during their school instruction time.^x Various municipal regulations characterize Tibetan Buddhism as ‘dangerous’ and ‘oppositional’ to China’s ideals of atheism and communism.^{xi} In conjunction with the erasure of Tibetan language and Buddhist teaching in schools, Tibetan children are forced to study Chinese language and patriotism.^{xii}

In effect, millions of Chinese children have had their inherent right to freedom of religion wrestled from their grips in contravention of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief stressed that, “Every individual child is a rights holder in his or her own capacity as recognized in Article 14 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.”^{xiii}

As the World Children’s Day approaches, we ask that you, as an important delegate to the United Nations, raise anew China’s violations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. China as a member of the UN Human Rights Council needs to be held at a higher standard, since the Council's membership influences its impacts. Exposing China’s human rights violations is essential in countering China’s influence at the UN and ensuring that every child is granted every right, including freedom of religion or belief.

Once again, thank you for your commitment to human rights and your attention to these matters.

Respectfully,

Organizations

Advocates International
Anglican Persecuted Church Network
China Aid Association
Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience
Christian Freedom International
GAFCON Suffering Church Network
Institute on Religion and Democracy
Jubilee Campaign

Individuals

Faith McDonnell, Director, International Religious Liberty Program, Institute on Religion and Democracy

ⁱ UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 20 November 1989, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577, [accessed 12 October 2020].

ⁱⁱ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Concluding observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of China*, 4 October 2013, CRC/C/CHN/CO/3-4, para. 42.

ⁱⁱⁱ World Watch Monitor, [“China bans children- and their teachers- from churches”](#), 8 September 2017.

Wang Zhicheng, [“Henan, church banned for children under 18: ‘taking the legs from under the Christian community’s growth among young people’](#)”, *AsiaNews.it*, 17 April 2018.

^{iv} World Watch Monitor, [“China: Christian Schoolchildren Forced to Tick ‘No Religion’ Box”](#), 2 October 2018.

^v Zhou Xiaolu, [“Bans on Minors’ Religious Activities Enforced Throughout China”](#), *Bitter Winter*, 25 October 2019.

^{vi} Shen Xinran, [“China Continues to Spread Communism Across College Campuses”](#), *Bitter Winter*, 25 March 2019.

^{vii} Human Rights Watch, [“China: Xinjiang Children Separated from Families”](#), 17 August 2020.

^{viii} Kavitha Surana, [“China Tells Citizens to Inform on Parents Who ‘Lure’ Kids into Religion”](#), *Foreign Policy*, 12 October 2016.

^{ix} UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 20 November 1989, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577, [accessed 12 October 2020].

^x Tibetan Review, “China cites education law to ban Tibetan children from religious devotion”, 26 July 2018.

^{xi} UF Dept document no. 121 (2018), “Nangchen County Party Committee United Front Department.”
Human Rights Watch, “China: Tibetan Children Banned from Classes”, 30 January 2019.

^{xii} Free Tibet and Tibet Watch, *Growing up under China’s occupation: the plight of Tibet’s children.*
Human Rights Watch, *China’s “Bilingual Education” Policy in Tibet*, March 2020.

^{xiii} United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *Children also have the right to freedom of religion or belief, and that must be protected*, 23 October 2015.