

AI Index: PRE 01/092/2009
09 March 2009

China: Amnesty International calls on Chinese authorities to open Tibet

Amnesty International today called on the Chinese government to immediately open Tibet to human rights monitors and the media and to end its “Strike Hard” campaign, launched in anticipation of protests to mark the 50th anniversary of the failed 1959 Tibetan uprising.

The organization warned that the increased security measures put in place by the Chinese government in the run up to the anniversary are likely to exacerbate an already tense situation.

“Extreme security measures only increase tension and lead to more human rights violations,” said Roseann Rife, Amnesty International Asia-Pacific Deputy Programme Director.

Since March 2008 there has been strict control on the flow of information from the region. Foreign journalists have only been allowed in on government organized group tours and all access has been denied to UN monitors.

In spite of this on-going closure and the recent increased military presence, Amnesty International is receiving reports of a number of human rights violations being carried out against the population. These include arbitrary detentions, arbitrary arrests, prolonged detention and imprisonment of peaceful protestors and other prisoners of conscience, torture and other ill-treatment, violations of freedom of expression, association and assembly, and of Tibetan people's right to maintain their culture, language and religion.

“The authorities should immediately open Tibet and allow independent human rights monitors and international media into the region,” said Roseann Rife. “The authorities should also issue a standing invitation to the UN human rights experts to visit the region.”

A recent white paper issued by the authorities characterizes all protest as attempts by Western anti-China forces to stir up unrest.

“The government position signals a failure by the Chinese authorities to acknowledge the depth of the long-standing grievances hold by the Tibetan population and is a misguided stance if social stability is the government’s goal,” said Roseann Rife.

Notes to editors:

- Over the past 12 months, farmers, nomads, students, labourers and intellectuals have joined monks and nuns in a number of protests prompted by ongoing human rights violations, as well as the intensification of the “patriotic education” campaign and the crackdown itself.

- The Chinese authorities have rejected criticism of their handling of the situation in Tibet as “ill-founded attempts to politicize the issue”. The authorities continue to portray the protests as individual incidents and maintain that the situation is not a matter of human rights but of violent separatism.
- In an official “white paper” earlier this month, the Chinese authorities accused the Western anti-China forces of training and supporting the Dalai Lama clique in order to restrain and split China.