



# Lessons from a Human Rights Disaster:

What the 2008 Olympics can teach us about the  
2022 Beijing Winter Games

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**TIBET**

  
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## Executive summary

“By allowing Beijing to host the Games you will help the development of human rights.”

So said Liu Jingmin in 2001, during the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) first successful bid to host an Olympic Games in Beijing. These words were spoken in a year when the CCP executed nearly 2,500 people and sent quarter of a million to labour camps. Nevertheless, both the CCP and the International Olympic Association insisted that Beijing hosting the 2008 Summer Olympics would see China become more open and would bring human rights reform.

These promises proved to be empty. The 2008 Summer Olympics were preceded with a violent crackdown in Tibet and a range of repressive measures that have turned it into the least free place on Earth. Since then, human rights abuses under CCP rule have exponentially worsened. The world has watched as the CCP rule has become harsher, democracy has been undermined in Hong Kong, and Uyghur Muslims have become the targets of genocide.

Despite the controversy surrounding the 2008 Olympics, protest was muted, with little action taken by governments and national Olympic committees. The decision to award the 2022 Winter Olympics to Beijing has reopened the debate about what can be done to challenge a host government that was emboldened after the 2008 Olympics, and which is now anticipating a second opportunity to use a prestigious event to sportswash its extensive human rights violations. This debate has come to even wider attention due to the Chinese government’s treatment of tennis player Peng Shuai.

Options for action include diplomatic and sporting boycotts, but doing nothing cannot be an option this time. The gravity of the human rights situation in Tibet is too serious for inaction.

Details are hard to come by from Tibet, where everyone is watched but very little can be seen from the outside. But collected in this report you will find evidence of extensive and widespread human rights violations. You will learn about:

- Tashi Wangchuk, who told the *New York Times* about the CCP’s efforts to wipe out the Tibetan language and was jailed for it;
- the 5,000 residents of the Larung Gar Buddhist community whose homes were demolished and were banned from ever joining a monastery or nunnery again;
- Rinchen Kyi, a teacher arrested in August 2021 for protesting the closure of a Tibetan school;
- Tenzin Nyima, a teenage monk who died in 2021 as a result of his treatment as a political prisoner;
- And about the 159 Tibetans since 2008 who saw no other route to protest than to set themselves on fire, often with fatal results.

Governments and national Olympic committees have the opportunity to support Tibet, and other peoples living under the CCP’s repressive rule. By taking action and working together, they could send an unprecedented and powerful message to the CCP that the world will not ignore its abuses. Coupled with other strong sanctions, such as those used to challenge South African apartheid alongside sporting boycotts, this could force real change and improve the lives of millions.

## Recommendations

**Heads of state and government officials** can publicly state that they are boycotting the entirety of the Games, demand that the Games be relocated, and raise human rights abuses with their Chinese counterparts.

**Parliamentarians** can publicly support the boycotts and raise CCP abuses through motions, questions and speeches in parliament.

**Sports bodies and Olympic associations** can carry out a boycott, urge the IOC to consider relocating the Winter Games, and at the very least support athletes who feel unable to attend the Games because of the CCP's actions.

**Athletes** are advised not to protest during the Games due to the risks to their safety. They can, however, educate themselves about the CCP's human rights abuses.

*"It truly boggles the mind. This decision will allow the Chinese police state to bask in the reflected glory of the Olympic Games despite having one of the most abominable human rights records in the world."*

Tom Lantos from the US House International Relations Committee, July 2001

*"I hope my fellow Tibetans in Tibet do not pay a price like the one I and others paid for the Olympic Games in 2008. I am deeply sorry that the IOC has rejected pleas from Tibetan, Chinese and so many other human rights defenders to keep the Games from Beijing."*

Golog Jigme, 2015

# Introduction

In 2022, Beijing will achieve a unique distinction, becoming the first city in history to have hosted both the Summer and Winter Olympic Games. At the same time, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which has ruled China since 1949, is facing growing criticism for its human rights record. Over the course of 2021, the public, media, politicians and human rights and civil society organisations have weighed in on a growing debate over whether Beijing is a suitable host for the 2022 Winter Games, and, if not, what action should be taken.

The call for action to be taken over the 2022 Winter Games is based on the ongoing and extensive human rights violations under CCP rule and also on memories of what happened the last time that Beijing hosted the Olympics. The 2008 Summer Olympics were awarded to Beijing at the turn of the century to fierce criticism. Opponents of the Beijing Summer Olympics, including human rights organisations and people with direct experience of CCP rule, expressed serious concerns about China's suitability as host. They asserted that such a prestigious event would give international legitimacy to the CCP's human rights violations and undermine collective international efforts to challenge them.

This report will focus on the lessons from the 2008 Olympics, the international response to those Olympics and how they have shaped the human rights situation in Tibet. It will apply these lessons to Beijing 2022 as the Winter Games draw nearer. It will seek to answer the following key questions:

- 1. What effect did the 2008 Beijing Olympics have on human rights?**
- 2. What lessons can be learned from the 2008 Summer Olympics?**
- 3. What can governments and Olympic Associations do to take a stand for human rights in the run-up to the 2022 Winter Games?**

It will answer these questions by evaluating the optimistic predictions made by Beijing and the IOC prior to 2008 and the concerns raised by human rights experts and Tibetans inside and outside of Tibet. The report will compare these predictions with reality, highlighting the key example of 2008: China's response to protests that swept across occupied Tibet in March that year. It will outline why the Tibetan protests took place and how China, having publicly committed to improving its human rights record, dealt with the grievances expressed by largely peaceful protesters.

Next the report will outline the policies that China has put in place since the 2008 Olympics in occupied Tibet, bringing the reader up to date with the current conditions that Tibetans live in. There will also be a brief overview of the human rights situation faced by other peoples living under CCP rule, namely Uyghurs and Southern Mongolians, people in Hong Kong and Chinese citizens.

The next section will draw parallels between the awarding of the 2008 Summer Olympics to Beijing and the IOC's decision to make Beijing host of the 2022 Winter Games and will examine whether lessons were learned.

The final section will evaluate the options open to governments and national Olympic committees that would enable them to make a stand for human rights in China and Tibet. It will comment on the likely effectiveness of each option, based on what actions were and were not taken in 2008.

## About Tibet

Tibet is located in the Himalayas to the south-west of China. It also borders Bhutan, India, Myanmar (Burma) and Nepal. If it were free, Tibet would be the world's 10th largest nation by geographical area.

In many people's minds, Tibet is home to the world's highest mountains, a nomadic way of life and a long, rich history intertwined with Tibetan Buddhism. They may have heard of the Dalai Lama or seen images from Tibet in films that capture the country's beauty and tranquillity. Unfortunately, Tibet today is the scene of some of the worst human rights abuses in the world; its people live under a harsh occupation after their country was invaded by China in 1950, the Dalai Lama has been in exile since 1959, unable to return home, and Tibet's environment and unique culture are under threat of destruction. It is one of the least free and most repressive places on Earth.

Nevertheless, Tibet has also seen a brave, tenacious and almost entirely non-violent resistance movement from the Tibetan people. Free Tibet and Tibet Watch work to amplify these voices. We believe that those of us living in freedom should pay attention to these voices.

## Methodology

The purpose of this report is to evaluate the current human rights context and draw on the lessons learned from 2008 to make a case for what governments and national Olympic committees can do as Beijing 2022 approaches if they want to take a stand against human rights abuses and genocide.

This report will focus on Tibet, a country invaded and occupied by the People's Republic of China in 1950 (see next section for further details). The human rights sections will frequently use information supplied by Tibet Watch, an organisation established in 2006 to carry out in-depth research on events in Tibet.

Occupied Tibet is effectively run as a police state and the level of surveillance and the severe punishments for Tibetans sharing information with the wider world present significant and growing obstacles to those wishing to gather information from inside Tibet. Tibet Watch uses a network of contacts within Tibet and the Tibetan diaspora to get information out of Tibet. To ensure accuracy at all times, all of the information that Tibet Watch receives is carefully checked and corroborated prior to publication. In general, sources are kept confidential by Tibet Watch to prevent reprisals against those who have given testimony or against their families and communities. Where information has come from Tibet via Tibet Watch, we will state in the endnotes "Information supplied by Tibet Watch" and the date that the information was secured. There will occasionally be a disparity between the date of the original event and the date that the information was supplied, a product of the extreme level of censorship and surveillance in Tibet.

As well as first-hand research, this report will also use publicly available sources including news reports from UK, Chinese and international media, press materials from the International Olympic Committee and reports from human rights organisations.

## 2001 – 2008: The promises made before Beijing 2008

In July 2001, the 2008 Summer Olympics were awarded to Beijing. It was one of the most divisive decisions in the history of the IOC and has only become more controversial with time. In a year in which the Chinese government oversaw the execution of at least 2,468 people and the detention of 260,000 others in “re-education through labour” camps<sup>1</sup>, 56 of the 105 IOC members voted for Beijing.

Those concerned with the Chinese government’s human rights record, including parliamentarians, human rights experts and Tibetans and other people with direct experience of CCP rule had warned the IOC against granting the 2008 Summer Olympics to Beijing. They reacted to the decision in July with strong warnings that this decision would reward the CCP for its poor human rights record and that the legitimacy it granted to the CCP would even see increased repression:

- *“It truly boggles the mind. This decision will allow the Chinese police state to bask in the reflected glory of the Olympic Games despite having one of the most abominable human rights records in the world.”*  
Tom Lantos from the US House International Relations Committee, July 2001<sup>2</sup>
- *“Following the example of Nazi Germany in 1936 and the Soviet Union in 1980, Communist China will use (the games) as a powerful propaganda instrument destined to consolidate its hold on power.”*  
François Loncle, head of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the French Parliament, July 2001<sup>3</sup>
- *“This will put the stamp of international approval for Beijing’s human rights abuses and will encourage China to escalate its repression.”*  
Kalon TC Tethong, a spokesman for the India-based Central Tibetan Administration, July 2001<sup>4</sup>
- *“We are outraged that the IOC has chosen to overlook the systematic destruction of Tibetan culture and human rights abuses committed by the Chinese government [...] Not only will we hold the IOC accountable for this decision, but we will ensure that, through these Games, the situation in Chinese occupied Tibet comes under public scrutiny as never before.”*  
Alison Reynolds, co-chair of Free Tibet, July 2001<sup>5</sup>
- *“If the 2008 Olympics take place, then they should stand for freedom and peace. As a Tibetan, I have neither freedom nor peace. Therefore I don’t want these games.”*  
A Tibetan monk, interviewed for the 2008 documentary film Leaving Fear Behind



A Tibetan freedom protest in Vancouver before the Beijing Olympics in 2008.

Those who challenged the IOC's decision were met with assurances that the very opposite would happen: that the Olympics would see greater openness and an improvement in China's human rights record. At every stage, from Beijing's initial proposal to the award ceremony to the eve of the 2008 Olympics, Chinese officials were adamant that they were committed to making changes to promote human rights in China. Although they were far from concrete, these claims were backed up by vocal support from the IOC, which between 2001 and 2008 repeatedly defended its decision to award the Games to Beijing, while stating that it would act should China fail to make the necessary changes. Today, these promises make for interesting reading:

- *"By allowing Beijing to host the Games you will help the development of human rights. China and the outside world need to integrate. China's opening up is irreversible. The Olympic Games is a good opportunity to promote understanding."*  
Liu Jingmin, Executive Vice President of the Beijing Organising Committee for the Games, April 2001
- *"I would like to mention that Beijing's bid for the 2008 Olympics will do good. Every country has their own human rights problem and **China will certainly pay more attention to human rights.**"*  
Liu Jingmin, April 2001
- *"We will give the **media complete freedom** to report when they come to China."*  
Wang Wei, Beijing Organising Committee for the Games, July 2001
- *"We are confident that the Games coming to China not only promotes our economy but also **enhances all social conditions, including education, health and human rights.**"*  
Wang Wei, July 2001
- *"[Awarding the Olympic Games to Beijing] will help promote all economic and social projects and will also **benefit the further development of our human rights cause.**"*  
Liu Qi, Mayor of Beijing, July 2001
- *"Some people say, because of serious human rights issues, 'We close the door and say no'? The other way is to **bet on openness**. Bet on the fact that in the coming seven years, openness, progress and development in many areas will be such that **the situation will be improved.**"*  
François Carrard, Executive Director of the IOC, July 2001
- *"The human rights problems remain an issue but it is more of a challenge and **an opportunity for the Olympic Movement to make a contribution** to some of its own goals – which is to put sport at the service of mankind everywhere and maybe **bring about some change.**"*  
Dick Pound, IOC Vice President, July 2001
- *"We are **convinced** that the Olympic Games will **improve human rights in China.**"*  
Jacques Rogge, April 2002
- *"Preparations for the Games have been going along with China's development, and **the rights of the people have been protected and improved** in the process."*  
Liu Jingmin, October 2007

These quotes are a representative sample of the criticism the IOC received for its decision in 2001, and the attempt so the IOC and the Chinese government to defend it. It is important to note the many of the predictions that things would get worse came from those with lived experience of CCP rule. The rosier predictions were from those who had an interest in the games going ahead: China and the IOC.



Refugees in Nang Pa La pass, 2006, with the body of Kelsang Namtso to the right; Refugees, including children, are led away by soldiers after the shootings.



As the next two sections will show, each of the optimistic predictions about China's human rights record turned out to be false, while the fears and concerns expressed by Tibetans, Tibet supporters and human rights advocates were proven to be correct. Between 2001 and 2008, China's human rights record *deteriorated*, with Amnesty International noting in its 2008 annual report that "[p] reparations for the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing were marked by repression of human rights activists", that torture "remained widespread" and noted ongoing repression against Tibetans, Mongolians and Uyghurs, religious groups and human rights defenders.<sup>6</sup>

The CCP's policy of cracking down on any sign of protest or dissent was perfectly illustrated by an incident in Tibet on 30 September 2006. A group of Tibetans attempting to flee to India were intercepted by Chinese border police as they walked through the mountainous Nang Pa La pass. The border police opened fire on the escaping Tibetans, killing Kelsang Namtso, a nun, and injuring several others. The Chinese government denied the shootings until video footage was released, taken by mountain climbers who witnessed the shootings, at which point the government claimed the shootings were in self-defence.

Despite the slide in human rights standards between 2001 and 2008, and the assurances that the Summer Olympics would bring change, the IOC did nothing to hold the Chinese government to account or even encourage a change in direction. A year after Beijing's successful bid, IOC President Jacques Rogge told BBC Hardtalk: "(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."<sup>7</sup> Two years later, in August 2004, Rogge had retreated from this position: "The IOC is always in favour of maximum application of human rights. We have clearly said that the position of the IOC is that human rights should be respected in full. But it is not up to the IOC to monitor human rights, we are not inspectors."<sup>8</sup> As the next chapter will show, by April 2008 the IOC had completely rejected any talk of improvements, stating that the West "stop hectoring China over human rights".

In August 2008, days before the opening ceremony, Sophie Richardson, then Asia Advocacy Director for Human Rights Watch, summed up the collective failure:

*"The Chinese government and the International Olympics Committee have had seven years to deliver on their pledges that these games would further human rights. Instead, the Beijing Games have prompted a rollback in some of the most basic rights enshrined in China's constitution and international law."*

*“The Chinese government and the International Olympic Committee have wasted a historic opportunity to use the Beijing Games to make real progress on human rights in China. The failure has damaged the prospects for a legacy of enhanced media freedom, greater tolerance for dissent, and respect for the rule of law.”<sup>9</sup>*

By this point, the conversation was no longer just about the CCP’s failure to implement human rights reforms, but its deadly response to protests that broke out in Tibet in March 2008. These protests demonstrated that it was not only distant international experts who were critical of the CCP; people living under the CCP were also critical of its rule. It is to these protests and the brutal crackdown that followed that this report will now turn its attention.

*“The Chinese government and the International Olympics Committee have had seven years to deliver on their pledges that these games would further human rights. Instead, the Beijing Games have prompted a rollback in some of the most basic rights enshrined in China’s constitution and international law.”*

Sophie Richardson, then Asia Advocacy Director for Human Rights Watch, 2008.



Protest in Labrang, Tibet 2008.

## 2008: Protests and violence

On 10 March 2008, hundreds of monks took to the streets in the capital city of Tibet, Lhasa, and peacefully protested against the Chinese repression. They called for freedom and the return of the Dalai Lama, their spiritual leader who was forced to escape from Tibet into exile on 10 March 1959.

A tidal wave of at least 125 non-violent protests quickly spread across the Tibetan plateau. The protestors were Tibetans from all walks of life: students, monks, nuns, nomads and elderly people, united in their opposition to the occupation of their country.

The largely non-violent protests were brutally suppressed. Thousands of Tibetans were detained after the protest and reports soon established that at least 100 were killed in and around Lhasa and 40 were shot dead or died from police violence in other Tibetan areas.<sup>10</sup> Hundreds of the detainees were tortured and profoundly psychologically disturbed upon release, with some unable to walk or speak.<sup>11</sup> Other detainees were loaded onto trains and sent to other parts of Tibet, a journey that saw more physical violence. According to an eyewitness in eastern Tibet in 2008: "Every prisoner seemed to be hurt badly and some had blood on their faces. There was an old lady in the group with heavy shackles on her feet, and no shoes. She was being beaten by the police."<sup>12</sup>

Tibet was then virtually sealed off from the world to hide these atrocities for months. Chinese state media announced on 25 June that Tibet was open for foreign tours, but monasteries were still closed and the whole atmosphere was guarded with intense security.<sup>13</sup> Tibet would never be the same again.

As the previous chapter showed, the IOC did little to challenge Beijing over its human rights violations between 2001 and 2008. In April, after it had been firmly established that Beijing was

using excessive force against Tibetan protesters, IOC President Jacques Rogge finally raised concern, issuing a public statement in which he: “reiterated the serious concerns and emotions of the IOC about the situation in Tibet [and] expressed the hope for a rapid and peaceful resolution of this crisis.”<sup>14</sup> Any hopes that this would lead to a firmer line from the IOC were dashed later that month, when Rogge told the Financial Times: “The West must...stop hectoring China over human rights...You don’t obtain anything in China with a loud voice.”<sup>15</sup>

The Olympics themselves opened on 8 August, with further human rights controversies persisting throughout. In a gesture towards freedom of expression, three official “protest zones” were set up in Beijing. The protest zones were announced in July 2008 and could be accessed by citizens with a permit. Despite 77 applications, no permits were successfully obtained. Among those whose applications were rejected were Ji Sizun, a grassroots legal activist who was imprisoned for three years, and Zhang Wei, who was attempting to protest the demolition of her home to make way for Olympics-related development. Zhang Wei was also later detained.<sup>16</sup> Commitments to press and Internet freedom, promoted by China and the IOC before the Beijing Olympics, were not observed. The Foreign Correspondents Club of China released a statement after the games had concluded in which it said: “The host government has not lived up to its Olympic promise that the media will be completely free to report on all aspects of China. The most disturbing trend was the rise in cases of police roughing up or beating reporters and breaking their cameras.”<sup>17</sup> Away from the Olympics, in Tibet, the protests had been put down, with long-term effects that will be seen in the next chapter.

In November 2008, the IOC published its official review of the Beijing Olympics, concluding that the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics had been a “indisputable success”. There was no mention of human rights.<sup>18</sup>

## 2008 – present: The worsening human rights situation in Tibet

Beijing never forgave Tibetans for their protests on the eve of the Beijing Olympics. Rather than addressing their grievances, Beijing’s rule over Tibet tightened, and Tibet has been transformed into one of the most closed and repressive places on earth, a giant prison from which most Tibetans cannot leave. Meanwhile, journalists, human rights organisations, United Nations experts and diplomats are all prevented from travelling to Tibet to monitor human rights abuses first hand.

Between 2015 and 2019, the US non-governmental organisation Freedom House ranked Tibet as the second worst place in the world for civil liberties and political rights. In 2021 it placed Tibet at the very bottom of its rankings, in joint last place with Syria and several places below North Korea.<sup>19</sup> Freedom of expression is virtually non-existent in Tibet, its unique culture and religion are under attack and its environment is being torn up to make way for extraction. Tibetans who protest their treatment risk beatings, imprisonment torture and even death.

As the following sections will show, the commitments made to improving human rights by Chinese officials are now a distant memory. The following summary highlights the key human rights issues in Tibet but is by no means exhaustive. For further details and up to date information on human rights in Tibet, visit [www.freetibet.org](http://www.freetibet.org) and [www.tibetwatch.org](http://www.tibetwatch.org).

A security camera hidden in a prayer wheel in Tibet.



## Turning Tibet into a police state

*Surveillance, censorship, security crackdowns*

Tibet is not just one of the most closed places on earth; it is also one of the most closely-monitored places on earth.

Following the 2008 protests, spending on security increased dramatically in Tibet. Thousands of police have been stationed across Tibetan villages to monitor residents as part of a campaign called “Solidify the foundation, benefit the masses”. In addition to monitoring residents, these teams ask villagers intrusive questions about their political and religious views, noting any early signs of dissent or loyalty to the Dalai Lama. This campaign, established in 2011 as a temporary measure, has been extended indefinitely.<sup>20</sup>

In 2012, the Chinese government tasked Chen Quanguo with the task of locking down Tibet to maintain “stability”. As Party Secretary of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), Chen imposed systematic surveillance across Tibet, through networks of informants, the establishment of hundreds of new police stations, increased technological surveillance and the deployment of military personnel in public spaces, community gatherings and at religious festivals. Neighbours were instructed to spy on each other. Chen also introduced the “grid system”, in which cities were divided into small sections, each monitored by a patrol made up of a Communist Party leader and civilian volunteers who gather comprehensive intelligence about the activities, loyalties and political views of Tibetans. Each of the police stations in this dense network in Lhasa is no more than 500 metres away from another police station.<sup>21</sup>

Nowhere is safe from surveillance: CCTVs have even been placed inside Tibet’s monasteries and nunneries to monitor the residents<sup>22</sup> and facial recognition and real time monitoring technology has been introduced into taxis in Lhasa.

With police, cameras and checkpoints everywhere, peaceful protest and dissent became riskier than ever. Tibetans live their day-to-day lives in a constant state of fear and self-censorship. A Tibetan from Lhasa described the psychological impact of surveillance in 2012: “How horrible it is! I dare not to look around in a casual manner, dare not move around freely. Armed personnel are everywhere, police are in every corner.”<sup>23</sup>

The Chinese government has also prioritised Internet surveillance. More than USD 6.6 billion was spent on Internet censorship in China last year and Tibetans have been offered cash prizes of up to

300,000 yuan (approximately USD 44,000) for reporting illegal online content from fellow Tibetans.<sup>24</sup> This Internet surveillance has led to the imprisonment of numerous Tibetans, including **Lhundup Dorje**, who was sentenced to one year in prison for posting the Dalai Lama's photo on his social media account in 2020<sup>25</sup>. The same year, **Tsering Tso** was detained and fined 1000 yuan for her posts on WeChat, a Chinese multipurpose messaging platform.<sup>26</sup>

It is increasingly difficult for Tibetans to obtain passports and authorities confiscate passports from Tibetans that have family or community links to dissidents and individuals that have carried out self-immolation protests, a form of collective punishment.<sup>27</sup>

## Destroying the Tibetan way of life

### *Attacks on Tibetans' language and culture*

As Tibetans are monitored and policed, their very way of life is under threat, with the occupying Chinese government implementing policies to eradicate Tibet's unique language and culture.

Tibetans are increasingly marginalised in their own country as their language disappears from schools and public buildings and is replaced by Mandarin Chinese. Policies introduced in 2010 to promote "bilingual education" in Tibet have gradually led to shrinking space for younger generations of Tibetans to learn Tibetan.<sup>28</sup> Monasteries, which traditionally taught Tibetan to the next generation outside of the state school system, have been prohibited from giving Tibetan classes to their nearby communities.<sup>29</sup>

In January 2016, after **Tashi Wangchuk**, a businessman and language advocate from eastern Tibet, spoke about the threat to the Tibetan language to the *New York Times*, he disappeared. Two months later his family learned he had been imprisoned and tortured. In May 2018, after more than two years in detention, Tashi was found guilty of "inciting separatism" and sentenced to five years in prison. Even after his release in January 2021, Tashi continues to be closely monitored.<sup>30</sup>

Under the rule of Chen Quanguo, attempts were made to eradicate Tibet's unique identity through a process dubbed "breaking lineage, breaking roots, breaking connections, and breaking origins". A campaign was launched to promote "ethnic unity" by offering rewards to Tibetans and Han Chinese who married and hundreds of thousands of Han Chinese settlers were transferred to Lhasa, where they now enjoy preferential access to employment and education. Almost all of the senior government, police and military positions in Tibet are held by Han Chinese members of the Chinese Communist Party.<sup>31</sup>



Tashi Wangchuk.

## Controlling religion

### *Repression of Tibetan Buddhism, demolition of religious communities*

The majority of Tibetans practice Tibetan Buddhism. They are permitted to do so within tight boundaries prescribed by the state, but since 2008 and particularly under Xi Jinping, these boundaries have become increasingly more restrictive and intrusive. In 2017, at the CCP's National Congress, Xi stated that religion must be brought under greater Party control.<sup>32</sup>

Tibet's monasteries and nunneries are forced to display their loyalty to the CCP and to one unified China. CCTVs have been set up inside monasteries to monitor the activities of monks and nuns, while rules have been imposed forcing all monasteries to fly Chinese flags and hang portraits of CCP leaders on their premises.<sup>33</sup>

These regulations have recently been reproduced in Tibetan homes; in January 2019, authorities ordered Tibetans to replace altars to religious figures, such as holy lamas, in their homes with shrines to Xi Jinping and Communist Party leaders. Testimonies from Dzoge County stated that authorities are inspecting households to see that this order has been carried out.<sup>34</sup>

The level of CCP control over religion in Tibet is illustrated by its treatment of the two most senior figures in Tibetan Buddhism: the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama, both of whom are recognised by Tibetans as reincarnated spiritual leaders. The **Dalai Lama** was forced to flee into exile in India in 1959 and has been unable to return to Tibet ever since. He is revered by Tibetans and across the rest of the world but his image is censored in Tibet as part of a deliberate effort by the CCP to break the bond between Tibetan Buddhists and the Dalai Lama. Tibetans have been arrested for displaying his image, writing about him, gathering to wish him happy birthday or calling for his return to Tibet.

- **Thardhod Gyaltzen**, a monk from Drongna Monastery in Driru County, was arrested in 2014 and later sentenced to 18 years in prison after police found images of the Dalai Lama and recordings of his teachings during a raid on his monastery.<sup>35</sup>
- In February 2016 two senior Tibetan monks, **Khenpo Pagah** and **Geshe Orgyen**, were detained following a large prayer ceremony held at their monastery for the good health of the Dalai Lama. They have not been heard from since.<sup>36</sup>

Meanwhile, **Gedhun Choekyi Nyima**, the Panchen Lama, remains missing. In 1995, the Dalai Lama identified the six-year-old Gedhun Choekyi Nyima as the 11th Panchen Lama, one of the most significant spiritual leaders in Tibetan Buddhism. Chinese authorities subsequently detained Gedhun Choekyi Nyima and his family, making him the world's youngest political prisoner at the time. He remains missing to this day, while the CCP promotes its own Panchen Lama, loyal to Beijing, but roundly rejected by Tibetans. Tibetans calling for information about the Panchen Lama or for his release are arrested. In 2019, **Wangchen** from eastern Tibet was sentenced to four and a half years in prison after shouting slogans calling for the release of the Panchen Lama.<sup>37</sup>

The most dramatic demonstration of Beijing's religious policies in Tibet has been its treatment of Larung Gar and Yarchen Gar, two huge Buddhist communities in eastern Tibet that were established in the 1980s and soon became home to tens of thousands of monks, nuns and students.



Houses are demolished at Larung Gar in 2017.

Between July 2016 and by May 2017, 4,828 residents were forced out of their homes in **Larung Gar**. 4,725 buildings were demolished.<sup>38</sup> Those who were removed were required to sign documents stating that they would never return to Larung Gar and were then driven by coach to other regions of Tibet, sometimes over 1,700 kilometres away. These former residents were not permitted to join new monasteries and nunneries upon returning to their native regions. Some of them were subjected to humiliating rituals in which they were made to dance in front of an audience of CCP members or sing Chinese patriotic songs.<sup>39</sup> In the summer of 2016, three nuns took their own lives in protest against the destruction of the site.<sup>40</sup>

Similar measures were imposed on **Yarchen Gar**. In 2017, thousands of residents were instructed to destroy their own homes or face seeing their houses and belongings destroyed. 3,500 homes were ultimately torn down.<sup>41</sup> In 2019, satellite images commissioned by Free Tibet showed that just under half of the western side of the site, where Yarchen Gar's nuns live, had been levelled,<sup>42</sup> with local sources stating that around 7,000 people were forcibly removed from Yarchen Gar that summer. At least some of the residents were held in internment facilities and subjected to "patriotic re-education" before being released. One nun took her life after she was returned to such a facility for continuing to protest against her removal.<sup>43</sup>

### **A place where it is illegal to be yourself**

#### *Restrictions on freedom of expression, arbitrary arrests, torture*

A significant pillar of China's security policy in Tibet is to completely silence expressions of dissent. As we saw with the case of Tashi Wangchuk, those who protest or speak out against the treatment of the Tibetan people are inevitably arrested and charged with state security crimes, as are those who express their culture or practice their religion in a way that displeases the authorities. Tibetans accused of state security crimes will be held in secret detention with no access from lawyers or even their families. In such conditions, they are at high risk of torture.



In 2001, the year Beijing was awarded the 2008 Olympic Games, Amnesty International recorded at least 250 political prisoners in Tibet.<sup>44</sup> Today there are, at the very least, 1,000 political prisoners across Tibet<sup>45</sup>, each with their own story:

- In April 2015, Tibetan writer **Lobsang Jamyang**, also known by his pen-name Lomig, was detained while attending a class at his monastery. His whereabouts remained unknown until May 2016, when he was sentenced to seven and a half years in prison for “leaking state secrets” and “engaging in separatist activities.” Local sources believe his arrest was due to his writings, which were critical of China’s policies in Tibet.<sup>46</sup>
- In December 2016, **Tenpa**, an 18-year-old monk, was seized by 10 Chinese police officers during a solo protest. He marched through the main street in Ngaba, eastern Tibet, carrying a Tibetan flag and a picture of the Dalai Lama while shouting slogans calling for freedom and the Dalai Lama’s return to Tibet and for freedom in Tibet. He was seized five minutes into his protest.<sup>47</sup>
- In March 2017, **Gendun**, from Sershul County in Kardze, was severely beaten and arrested for sharing pictures of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan national flag on WeChat.<sup>48</sup>
- In September 2018, **A-Nya Sengdra**, a prominent Tibetan anti-corruption activist, was arrested in Gade County. After being held without trial for over a year, he was found guilty of “provoking trouble” and “organising a mob to disturb social order” in December 2019 and sentenced to seven years in prison.<sup>49</sup>
- **Sonam**, a master’s degree student in Lanzhou City, was arrested in 2019 after an essay he wrote for his civil service entrance exam, criticising the falling number of government job opportunities for Tibetans, was posted to social media.<sup>50</sup>
- Six Tibetans – **Tsegyal, Yangphel, Dudul Lhagyay, Norsang, Shewang Namgyal and Sithar Wangyal** – were arrested in Tarchen Township, Nagchu, central Tibet on 20 September 2019 after refusing to take part in official events to mark the 70th anniversary of the People’s Republic of China.<sup>51</sup>
- In 2020, **Lhundrub Drakpa** was sentenced to six years in prison for performing a song he had written that criticised Chinese government’s repressive policies in Driru County. He was beaten while in detention.<sup>52</sup>
- In August 2021, **Rinchen Kyi**, a school teacher, was detained and charged with “inciting separatism” one month after her school, one of the few remaining schools teaching in the Tibetan language, was closed down. Her whereabouts and condition are currently unknown.<sup>53</sup>



A-Nya Sengdra;  
Lhundrub Drakpa;  
Rinchen Kyi.

Former Tibetan prisoners who have escaped into exile have described in detail the frequent and systematic use of torture they face after being arrested, whether in police stations, prisons or hidden detention centres across Tibet.

These testimonies include beatings by police and other security services during interrogation sessions, mock executions, the use of electric shocks during interrogations and prisoners locked in cells that were pitch black or were so small that they could not move around.<sup>54</sup>

In July 2013 highly respected Tibetan leader, **Tenzin Delek Rinpoche**, died in prison after serving 13 years for a crime he did not commit. He had been denied medical parole and after his death, prison authorities cremated his remains against the wishes of his family.<sup>55</sup> A week after Tenzin Delek Rinpoche's death, Tibetan political prisoner **Lobsang Yeshe** died in hospital aged 64, and again authorities refused to hand over his body and cremated his remains.<sup>56</sup>

In the first two months of 2021 alone, two political prisoners have died from the treatment in custody. **Tenzin Nyima**, a 19-year-old monk, was taken from his facility to hospital in November 2020 in a comatose state and died two months later.<sup>57</sup> In February, **Kunchok Jinpa** died having been moved from prison. His family later found out he had a brain haemorrhage and was paralysed.<sup>58</sup>

China continues to hold a number of political prisoners who are reported to be in very poor health, including **Yeshe Choedron**, who is serving a 15-year sentence for "espionage", a charge that appears to have stemmed from her human rights activism and participation in protests in Lhasa in 2008. Local sources in contact with Yeshe Choedron's family have recommended that she be granted medical parole due to her current state of health.<sup>59</sup>

The use of torture in Tibet has been noted by the United Nations. In November 2015, during China's review by the United Nations Committee Against Torture, the Committee found that that the practice of torture and ill-treatment is "still deeply entrenched in the criminal justice system", which "overly relies on confessions as the basis for convictions". This included "numerous reports from credible sources that document in detail cases of torture, deaths in custody, arbitrary detention and disappearances of Tibetans."<sup>60</sup>

## Forced relocations and environmental damage

### *How Tibetan's land and traditional way of life are under threat*

Historically, Tibetans led a sustainable lifestyle based on farming and nomadic pastoralism. They had lived intimately in nature for thousands of years, and learned how to care and manage their cattle according to the limits of the grasslands and seasons they all depend on. However, the Chinese government has decided that the nomadic lifestyle is backward and unscientific. It has demonstrated its contempt for them by forcing millions of nomads from their pastures.

International experts have warned the Chinese government against relocating nomads, recommending that the Chinese authorities listen to their concerns about how past policies have affected their lives.<sup>61</sup> Instead, the mass relocations continued at an unprecedented scale and, in January 2014, China's official Tibet TV website announced that it had successfully relocated 2.3 million rural Tibetans from across Tibet into urban settlements. Human rights monitors have noted that these settlements have been rapidly built and are poor in quality, as well as an alienating environment for nomads. The organisation of the rural population into concrete settlements has made it easier for authorities to systematically monitor and control them.<sup>62</sup>

This mass relocation was achieved without listening to Tibetans' concerns or grievances. The majority of resettled people struggled to make the transition from self-sufficient farming on their ancestral land to generating an income in an urban environment due to their lack of relevant skills and the considerably higher costs of food and utilities. Financial support offered to these rural Tibetans was not provided. Lacking the means to meet the costs of the relocation and rehousing,



Tibetan herders in Gannan; Nomad resettlement in Rebkong, 2015.

many of those who were relocated were required to sell off some or all of their livestock, while others were left with unmanageable debts.<sup>63</sup> For example, in 2015, hundreds of families from Chone County, north-eastern Tibet were encouraged to sell their livestock and promised compensation. Three years passed without their promised money. In September 2018, 20 Tibetan nomads, including some very elderly Tibetans protested late into the evening by sitting in front of the local government's offices demanding the promised compensation.<sup>64</sup>

The transfer of rural Tibetans remains ongoing and is beginning to attract international concern. In September 2020, an analysis of Chinese government documents found that, in 2020, half a million rural Tibetans were put through a process of "military style" re-education to reform their "backward thinking". The Tibetans were trained in "work discipline" and "work ethics", before being dispatched across Tibet and China to work in roles such as road construction, cleaning, mining, cooking and driving.<sup>65</sup> The findings resulted in a debate in the UK parliament, in which MPs noted with concern that this programme involved coercion and was attempt to dilute Tibetans' cultural identity.<sup>66</sup>

On 25 February 2021, President Xi Jinping claimed that China had eradicated absolute poverty across the whole country, including occupied Tibet. In reality, the Chinese government had uprooted people in Tibet from their ancestral land and compelled them to take up profession that have no relation to their centuries old culture and skills of protecting their nature.

The degradation of grassland across the Tibetan plateau has now become even more complex with the climate crisis. The Tibetan plateau is warming three times faster than the global average, and irreversible damage will be done if this is not reversed, not just to Tibet, but also to billions of people across Asia who depend on the water that originates from glaciers in Tibet.

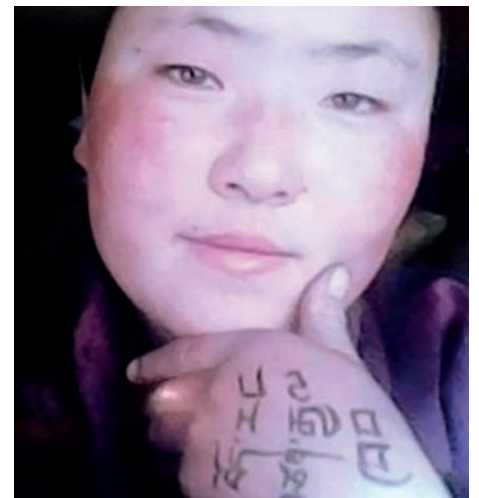
This environmental damage is exacerbated by intensive extraction of minerals under Tibet's soil. Chinese government-owned mining companies have dug up Tibetan land to mine copper, gold and silver in Tibet without regard for the local environment or the wishes of Tibetans. Extraction of materials such as lithium has resulted in the pollution of rivers that Tibetan communities depend on. In April 2016 the residents of Dartsedo County in eastern Tibet protested to the local government after toxic chemicals used by a lithium company leaked from its nearby mine, for a second time, into the river that served their farmland, killing fish and livestock.<sup>67</sup>

## The human cost: Self-immolation protests in Tibet

On 27 February 2009, a young monk in his twenties named Tapey doused himself in oil and set himself on fire. Walking in the crossroads in the market area of his hometown of Ngaba, eastern Tibet, he carried a home-made Tibetan flag with the Dalai Lama's photo in its centre. He was immediately shot and taken away by the People's Armed Police after his fire was extinguished. The incident occurred after a prayer ceremony, organised by his monastery, was cancelled. The prayers were meant for twenty teenagers who were massacred the year before by the local authorities in a violent crackdown.<sup>68</sup>

Tapey's act was the first self-immolation protest in Tibet. Self-immolation is a shocking act and to most people may seem inexplicable, but to the Tibetans carrying them out, they are a way of expressing their despair at the occupation of their country, the destruction of their way of life and the abuses against their fellow Tibetans. Many of those who have carried out these protests have left notes explaining their motives, or shouted slogans as they set themselves on fire, calling for freedom.

As of September 2021, the number of self-immolations inside Tibet stands at 159.<sup>69</sup> The majority of them have been fatal.



Tapey, who self-immolated in 2009; Sangye Dolma, 17, carried out a fatal self-immolation protest in 2012.

## The repression spreads

While this report is about Tibet and the dramatic plunge in human rights there after the 2008 Olympics, it is important to highlight that other groups are facing repression under CCP rule. These include many brave Chinese dissidents and human rights lawyers, and also the people of Hong Kong and Southern Mongolia. Perhaps most shocking of all is the treatment of the Uyghur people, who live to the north of Tibet and are currently facing what a growing number of governments have called a genocide.

Under an agreement between China and the UK, Hong Kong has benefited from a degree of political and social freedom not seen elsewhere under CCP rule. These freedoms are rapidly being eroded after the introduction of the draconian National Security Law in 2020 and a police crackdown, which has since seen over 10,000 protesters arrested in Hong Kong.<sup>70</sup> In January 2020, six months after the pro-democracy protest began, one-third of adults in Hong Kong reported symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder due to the repressive police response.<sup>71</sup> More Hongkongers are going into exile out of fear of future persecution, some risking their lives to leave by sea.<sup>72</sup> In February 2021, the *Washington Post* reported that every high-profile Hong Kong activist was either in jail or in exile.<sup>73</sup>

In Southern Mongolia, the Mongolian language is systematically being removed from schools in a similar manner as the Tibetan language in Tibet. This move has prompted fears that it may be eliminated entirely. Protests against this policy have been broken up by police.<sup>74</sup>

The Uyghur people are currently facing, in the words of Human Rights Watch, abuses on “a scope and scale not seen in China since the 1966-1976 Cultural Revolution”.<sup>75</sup> At least a million Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslim minorities are interned in concentration camps and labour camps, where they face torture, starvation, murder and widespread rape.<sup>76</sup> Evidence has emerged of a pipeline between the camps and factories across China that could amount to forced labour. In March 2020, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute published a report estimating that at least 80,000 Uyghurs had been coercively assigned to factories producing goods for up to 83 foreign and Chinese companies.<sup>77</sup>

The Uyghur region, known in China as Xinjiang but by Uyghurs as their homeland of East Turkestan, is currently under the rule of Chen Quanguo, formerly the senior Chinese official in Tibet. Chen has sought to introduce many of the policies he inflicted on Tibet, including his surveillance and security policies and also his attempts to extinguish the Uyghurs’ unique culture through the policy of “breaking lineage, breaking roots, breaking connections, and breaking origins”.<sup>78</sup> All mosques and imams are heavily monitored by the Chinese government and must be government-approved. Even owning a Quran or prayer mat, growing a long beard or wearing an Islamic veil are banned. Communicating religious messages online is also strictly forbidden. The Uyghur language has been banned or discouraged in schools and public offices in East Turkestan. Teaching children under 18 about religion has been banned, as well as giving them traditional Islamic names.<sup>79</sup>

Most disturbingly of all, work by researchers and testimonies from Uyghur women have revealed the use of forced sterilisations and abortions on hundreds of thousands of Uyghur women.<sup>80</sup> The evidence of forced sterilisation has prompted the United States, Canada, the Netherlands to declare China’s actions against the Uyghurs a genocide.<sup>81</sup>

Uyghur Detainees at a re-education camp in 2017.





Golog Jigme.

## Repeating the mistake: The awarding of the 2022 Winter Games

In July 2015, the IOC selected Beijing as the host city for the 2022 Winter Games. Beijing narrowly beat the only alternative venue, Almaty in Kazakhstan. Golog Jigme, a monk and former Tibetan political prisoner highlighted how history appeared to be repeating itself:

*“I hope my fellow Tibetans in Tibet do not pay a price like the one I and others paid for the Olympic Games in 2008. I am deeply sorry that the IOC has rejected pleas from Tibetan, Chinese and so many other human rights defenders to keep the Games from Beijing.”*

Golog Jigme was arrested and tortured in 2008 after having made a film, *Leaving Fear Behind*, interviewing Tibetans in Tibet about their views on the Chinese occupation of Tibet and the 2008 Beijing Olympics. The similarities he highlighted between the 2008 Summer Olympics and the 2022 Winter Games are clear: once again, China was being granted the right to host an Olympic event, despite its well-documented and heavily-criticised human rights record. Once again, those living under CCP rule were afraid that this would undermine international efforts to halt its human rights abuses.

In other ways, the situation before the 2022 Winter Games is very different than before the 2008 Olympics: firstly, as demonstrated above, the human rights situation under CCP rule is even worse now than before the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Secondly, criticisms of the decision to award Beijing the 2022 Winter Games and about China’s human rights record have not been contested by the Chinese government or the IOC. The examples of promises made on pp.7-8 have no equivalent in 2021. The IOC has barely mentioned human rights, and there are no human rights commitments in Beijing’s host city contract.<sup>82</sup> In 2015, during the bidding process, the IOC visited both Beijing and Almaty to see conditions first hand, but the IOC’s official reports did evaluate human rights concerns in China, save for media freedom and Internet access. The IOC stated that it received “written assurances” that there would be no restrictions.<sup>83</sup> As detailed on page 12, a similar assurance was made, and subsequently broken, before the 2008 Summer Olympics. In 2015, Reporters Without Borders ranked China 176th out of 180 countries for media freedom and online freedom.<sup>84</sup> In 2021, China sits in 177th place out of 180.<sup>85</sup>

There has been no pressure on the Chinese government to repeat the promises it made in 2008. With no mechanism in place in advance of the 2022 Winter Games, governments and sporting associations will have to find other methods to push for human rights. These methods will be examined in the next section.

## A missed opportunity? Actions taken and not taken in 2008

As outlined above, there was international criticism of the decision to award the 2008 Summer Olympics to China, but little in the way of action by the time that Olympics had begun. There was no sporting boycott and only a handful of governments carried out a diplomatic boycott. A handful did boycott the opening ceremony in protest, including Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, Czech President Václav Klaus, Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves and the Japanese royal family.

Other leaders, such as Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, chose to stay away from the opening ceremony without explicitly backing a boycott or stating that they were making a stand for human rights<sup>86</sup>.

There was no common European Union position on a boycott, with 27 EU leaders meeting in Slovenia in late March 2008, two weeks into China's crackdown in Tibet, and ultimately agreeing to a motion that the Chinese government should hold direct negotiations with the Dalai Lama.<sup>87</sup>

Ultimately at least 105 heads of state and government attended the opening ceremony, the largest in history until the 2012 Summer Olympics. Those present included Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, French President Nicolas Sarkozy, Japanese Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and US President George W. Bush.<sup>88</sup> There appeared to be recognition later that year that most world leaders had missed an opportunity; later that year, both US Presidential candidates, John McCain and Barack Obama, stated that they would have boycotted the opening ceremony if they were in the White House.<sup>89</sup>

There was no sporting boycott in 2008, with athletes participating as planned. The closest thing was the action of Japanese craftsman Masahisa Tsujitani, who refused to send his shot-puts for use in Beijing. Tsujitani stated that he empathised with the athletes and said it was not their fault, "I feel badly for the athletes who won't get to use my shots, but after Tibet, I know I am right. Enough is enough".<sup>90</sup>

## What can be done before Beijing 2022?

The international political climate is significantly different today than in 2008, or even 2015, when the 2022 Winter Games were awarded to Beijing. Despite the lack of acknowledgement of China's human rights violations from the IOC, a growing number of international governments and parliaments have been vocal in their criticism of China's policies, particularly following revelations of mass incarceration of Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples living north of Tibet. In late January 2021, the outgoing Trump administration voted to recognise the CCP's policies against the Uyghurs as a genocide.<sup>91</sup> Votes by the Canadian and Dutch parliaments in February and the UK House of Commons in April came to the same conclusion.<sup>92</sup>

China's suitability as a host was further thrown into doubt in November 2021 when Chinese tennis player Peng Shuai reported that she had been sexually assaulted by a senior CCP official. Peng Shuai's online post detailing her experiences was removed and she disappeared, resurfacing a week later in what appeared to be a series of carefully managed appearances. While athletes, sporting associations and governments expressed concern for Peng Shuai and demanded that her allegations be investigated, the IOC was criticised by Human Rights Watch for "active collaboration with Chinese authorities in undermining freedom of speech and disregarding alleged sexual assault". To campaigners, this was the latest sign that there was no prospect of the IOC challenging the Chinese government on human rights.<sup>93</sup>

This section will detail what courses of action are available to governments, athletes, national Olympic committees and sponsors. It will outline how effective these actions are likely to be in aiding those pushing for China to rectify its human rights abuses and where applicable will provide examples of these actions already being taken.

## Diplomatic boycott

**Who is this option available to?** Heads of state, governments and other dignitaries.

**Rationale:** A diplomatic boycott is the strongest option available to governments and heads of state. Under a diplomatic boycott, officials would refuse to attend the opening or closing ceremonies of Beijing 2022, ideally while clearly stating why they are staying away. Since 2008, numerous governments have spoken out against China's human rights record and a diplomatic boycott represents a tangible opportunity to back these words up with action.

The efficacy of a diplomatic boycott lies in collective action. As outlined above, a small number of heads of state and heads of government boycotted the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics, and not all of them stated why there were not attending. The majority of countries did send officials, who appeared on television, applauding China's hosting efforts.

For a diplomatic boycott of Beijing 2022 to be as effective as possible, governments should coordinate a diplomatic boycott, state that they will not legitimise an Olympic event being held in a country where the government is carrying out torture and genocide, and condition any support for future sporting events in China on wide-ranging and demonstrable improvements in China's human rights record.

**Effectiveness of the action:** A coordinated, widely-observed and vocal diplomatic boycott has the potential to be very effective. China is a powerful country but like all countries, it still occupies a place in a wider international system, which it depends on for trade and security. A coordinated boycott from its peers would be a well-balanced, meaningful rebuke to the Chinese government.

## Full boycott

**Who is this option available to?** national Olympic committees and governments. Although the decision ultimately would rest with the Olympic association – due to the Olympic movement's separation of sport and politics – a government would still be able to recommend a full boycott on human rights grounds.

**Rationale:** The efficacy of a full boycott lies in its comprehensive rejection of the CCP's right to host the Winter Games. While a diplomatic boycott would register a country's opposition to China's human rights abuses during the opening and closing ceremonies, the non-participation of athletes



would be felt throughout the entire event. As with a diplomatic boycott, it would be a powerful rebuke and would set a precedent for further sporting events that China wishes to host, such as the FIFA World Cup. As with a diplomatic boycott, a full boycott would be most effective if carried out in a coordinated manner; the more nations that boycott, the greater the challenge to the CCP's legitimacy as a host.

There are several key additional points to take into account when evaluating a sporting boycott. The first one is the sacrifice that athletes would be required to make were a national Olympic committee to boycott. The training and preparation required by athletes for an event that takes place every four years are considerable investments. Ultimately, a full boycott is a decision that national Olympic committees will have to weigh up based on the evidence presented above. Torture, mass incarceration and genocide are acts of such severity that a boycott merits consideration.

The scale of the human rights abuses also must be considered in response to any arguments that politics and sport are separate. In practice, the CCP's hosting of the 2022 Winter Games is inextricably linked to politics, functioning as a form of soft power that deflects criticism for its policies against Tibetans and other peoples subject to human rights abuses.

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that a sporting boycott is not an isolated policy, nor a comprehensive solution in its own right; it would be part of a wider set of actions. In March 2021, Canada the European Union, the United Kingdom and United States imposed coordinated, targeted sanctions on four senior Chinese officials responsible for abuses in the Uyghur region. Several of these countries have also worked with UN human rights mechanisms to challenge China's human rights record, and their leaders have raised human rights concerns directly with their Chinese counterparts. A sporting boycott fits into this wider set of actions, acknowledging that every available opportunity should be used to urgently put pressure on China to change its human rights policies. A full boycott should therefore not be evaluated on whether it can force a change by itself, it should be judged on whether it would complement or ongoing efforts elsewhere to end genocide and human rights abuses. Such an approach was utilised in the 1980s against apartheid South Africa, with sporting boycotts complementing the efforts of governments and activists and ultimately producing one of the most significant victories for human rights in the twentieth century.

**Effectiveness of the action:** A full boycott is the strongest course of action available to national Olympic committees. It would have a seismic effect on the Chinese government and international sporting bodies, which would be forced to think twice before awarding another prestigious event to China so long as its government oversees widespread human rights violations.

## Statements against the Beijing 2022 Winter Games

**Who is this option available to?** national Olympic committees, governments, parliamentarians, athletes, inter-parliamentary groups.

**Rationale:** Issuing public statements to social media followers, constituents and the wider public, writing newspaper articles and speaking publicly about the Chinese government's human rights record can also be useful means to spread the message that Beijing should not be hosting the Winter Games. Where parliaments have voted for a diplomatic boycott, such statements can also be a means of pushing the government to act on the will of parliament.

Such statements can also present a powerful challenge to the CCP, as seen by the vocal activism of basketball player Enes Kanter Freedom, who in late 2021 began raising the CCP's human rights record on social media, at rallies and through customised footwear, which has featured slogans including "Free Tibet," "Free Hong Kong," "No Beijing 2022," and "Made with slave labor."

**Effectiveness of the action:** This action is somewhat effective in that it would raise awareness and promote the rationale for boycotting Beijing 2022 and can attract other MPs and athletes to the cause. Statements would be most effective if complementing a bigger action such as a boycott.

## Demand that the IOC move the Winter Games

**Who is this option available to?** national Olympic committees, governments, parliamentarians, athletes, inter-parliamentary groups.

**Rationale:** The IOC has not been seriously challenged by governments or national Olympic committees over its choice of host. Nor was it challenged before the 2008 Olympics. Demanding that the Winter Games be moved, while announcing a diplomatic and/or sporting boycott, could force the IOC to re-evaluate its decision and would challenge the CCP's legitimacy as a host.

Although the Winter Games are less than 100 days away, the gravity of the human rights abuses against Tibetans, Uyghurs and other peoples and groups arguably outweighs the need to adhere to a strict calendar. The 2020 Tokyo Olympics, for example, were delayed by a year due to the pandemic. Were the Winter Games to successfully be moved due to sufficient international pressure, athletes would ultimately be able to compete but in an environment where they would not be used as propaganda by a totalitarian government that is attempting to shield its human rights record from international criticism.

**Effectiveness of the action:** This action has the potential to be effective in conjunction with the threat of a boycott, particularly if it is coordinated between multiple governments and national Olympic committees. Without the threat of a boycott, this demand would probably lose some of its efficacy, particularly given how close the Winter Games are.

Even more so than a boycott, a demand that the Winter Games be moved would also challenge the IOC directly. It would also potentially force it to re-evaluate how it awards Olympic events in the future, which would provide a long-term positive human rights impact that lasts beyond the 2022 Winter Games.

## Protests at Beijing 2022 by athletes

**Who is this option available to?** Athletes.

**Rationale:** The human rights cases detailed above in this report may provoke the desire to protest at Beijing 2022, confronting Chinese authorities directly and evoking iconic protests from previous sporting events.

Protesting at Beijing carries severe risks. Censorship is strict in China and athletes criticising the regime may risk deportation or even arrest. This applies not only to public protests, but also criticism of the regime on messaging apps, or by more subtle means such as wearing something symbolically criticising China's human rights record. Athletes may choose to criticise the Chinese government's human rights record once the Games have concluded and upon their return to their country, which would be a far safer course of action, but also ineffective.

The IOC will penalise athletes who violate Article 50 of the Olympic Charter on protest, a point of contention with national Olympic committees, particularly with regard to anti-racism protests. Should athletes travel to Beijing, national Olympic committees must make it clear that athletes in principle have a right to protest, and that fears about embarrassing the host nation and sponsors, or mixing sport and politics, are minor concerns in comparison to the documented torture and genocide being carried out by the host nations. However, this must be balanced by making athletes fully aware of the risks of protesting in China.

**Effectiveness of the action:** Protests by athletes in Beijing are unlikely to be possible and more importantly, they will be dangerous. Free Tibet cannot recommend such a course of action.

### Do nothing

Doing nothing is effectively the option taken by governments and national Olympic committees in 2008. No action was taken to hold the Chinese government to account for breaking its human rights commitments in the lead up to the games, and save for some strong words in March 2008, no action was taken in response to the violent crackdown and death of unarmed protesters in Tibet. By the end of the closing ceremony, China was being applauded for holding a successful Olympics.

As shown above, the ultimate outcome of this inaction has been expanded crackdowns and ultimately genocide against the Uyghur people, the abolition of a series of civil liberties in Hong Kong and the conversion of Tibet into a police state. Doing nothing is not an option.

Activists from the Tibetan Youth Association in Europe protest outside the IOC headquarters.



## What has been done so far?

Readers of this report who are considering the above actions need to be aware that they would not be alone. 2021 has seen significant action from governments, parliaments and individual politicians, either working alone or through groups like the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China.

Most significantly, just as this report was being finalised, the governments of the United States, New Zealand, Australia the United Kingdom and Canada each stated that they would be carrying out a diplomatic boycott of Beijing 2022.<sup>94</sup>

In the UK, several UK MPs, including the Conservatives Iain Duncan Smith and Tim Loughton and Labour's Chris Bryant have made statements in parliament or written articles calling on the government to boycott the Games.<sup>95</sup> Some MPs, including the Liberal Democrat leader Ed Davey and Wera Hobhouse have said that this should be expanded into a full boycott.<sup>96</sup>

Individual MPs have also questioned government officials. Tim Loughton MP used a parliamentary question to ask the Prime Minister directly whether the UK government would consider a diplomatic boycott. In Germany, Member of the Bundestag Gyde Jensen asked the Secretary of State for a public commitment from the German government to carry out a diplomatic boycott and in Canada, Garnett Genuis MP asked the same of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Similar actions were carried out in June 2021 by Danish, Lithuanian, Swedish and Swiss MPs, while in Italy, Senator Lucio Malan introduced a motion encouraging broadcasters to commit to dedicating time to discussions of human rights issues in China. These actions were coordinated internationally by members of the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China.<sup>97</sup>

June 2021 saw motions on a diplomatic boycott debated in the UK House of Commons and the European Parliament. MPs in the House of Common voted overwhelmingly in favour of a motion calling on the UK government to decline any invitations to the Winter Games, while MEPs in the European Parliament voted in favour of a motion calling for representatives of EU member states to carry out a diplomatic boycott. That same month, The United States Senate has passed a Bill confirming a diplomatic boycott of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics.<sup>98</sup>

Also in the United States, a bipartisan resolution was submitted to Congress in June, calling on the IOC to start an "emergency search process" for a suitable replacement venue for the 2022 Winter Olympics given ongoing crimes against humanity committed by the host government.<sup>99</sup>

In July, the US Congressional-Executive Commission on China conducted a hearing on corporate sponsorship at the Beijing Olympics, with Democrat and Republican congresspeople questioning representatives from Airbnb, Coca-Cola, Intel, Procter & Gamble and Visa over their sponsorship of the 2022 Winter Games.<sup>100</sup>

This list of actions taken is not exhaustive and is likely to have grown further by the time that this report has been released, as the time comes for governments and national Olympic committees to decide how they will act on various motions or respond to growing calls for boycotts and other action.

# Conclusion

The world once again faces the prospect of a Beijing Olympics. While the CCP is responsible for the repression in Tibet during and after 2008, the IOC must also hold a high level of complicity and blame. It was a serious error of judgement to ignore the warnings against granting Beijing the 2008 Summer Olympics, but to award Beijing a second Olympic Games removes all excuses of naivete and ignorance. Quite simply, the IOC has shown that it attaches no value to the lives of Hongkongers, Uyghurs and Tibetans. The IOC must be condemned in the strongest possible terms for Beijing 2022 and any human rights abuses that result from it. The IOC's dereliction of duty also places the impetus on governments, national Olympic committees and sponsors to learn the lessons of 2008 and take appropriate action in 2022.

This report began by asking three questions:

1. **What effect did the 2008 Beijing Olympics have on human rights?**
2. **What lessons can be learned from the 2008 Summer Olympics?**
3. **What can governments and Olympic Associations do to take a stand for human rights in the run-up to the 2022 Winter Games?**

## 1. What effect did the 2008 Beijing Olympics have on human rights?

As this report has shown, the effect of the 2008 Olympics has been overwhelmingly negative. The promises that the 2008 Olympics would improve human rights under CCP rule were abandoned and today things for Tibetans, as well as Hongkongers, Southern Mongolians and Uyghurs are far worse. Every one of the promises made by the Chinese government and predictions by the IOC that China would use the Summer Olympics to improve its human rights record turned out to be false. Every one of the predictions made by human rights experts, Tibetans and Tibet supporters, that the CCP would use the Games to legitimise its abuses – a process known as sportswashing – turned out to be accurate.

For Tibetans, 2008 was the start of a new era of repression that continues to worsen for Tibetans, as well as other peoples living under CCP rule. The gravity of the human rights abuses and lack of international solidarity has seen at least 159 Tibetans carry out self-immolation protests. This is the result of choices by the IOC and international governments to ignore the CCP's abuses rather than stand up to them.

## 2. What lessons can be learned from the 2008 Summer Olympics?

The lessons from 2008 are clear: Granting the CCP the right to host another Olympic event after it tore up its promises from 2008 and has since rejected any human rights reform was a serious error of judgement. The human rights abuses and atrocities detailed in the middle section of this report should have ensured that Beijing was no part of the discussions when selecting a host for the 2022 Winter Olympics. The 2022 Winter Games present a new opportunity for the CCP to enjoy the legitimacy and prestige of being the host of an Olympic event at the same time as international pressure for human rights reformed is undermined. This time, there is not even a pretence that the 2022 Winter Olympics will create more openness or human rights reform. Quite simply, a repressive regime has been rewarded for mass killings, torture, policies designed to wipe out other cultures and genocide.

### 3. What can governments and Olympic Associations do to take a stand for human rights in the run-up to the 2022 Winter Games?

Finally, this report has laid out a list of viable actions that governments, national Olympic committees, athletes and parliamentarians can take if they care about protecting the international system of human rights. The IOC promised in 2008 that it would oversee an improvement in human rights in China. It failed. These predictions were soon contradicted by actual events. The IOC did nothing to encourage China to change course, even reserving its criticism for those urging it to act. Given the plummet in human rights standards since 2008, the risks are too big for us to trust the IOC again. Governments and national Olympic committees must take the lead.

Each of the actions listed in the report comes with a potential cost, be it a critical response from Beijing or the fear of missing out on a prestigious Olympic event after years of training. However, if the list of empty words and broken promises from Beijing and IOC are of any use, it is as a reminder that words are only worth anything if they are backed up with real action. Millions of Tibetans, Uyghurs and other people living under CCP rule would benefit from a firm, timely intervention from governments who have heard their voices and demonstrated that they have the courage and moral clarity to act. Those who do act, will find their own source of glory: they will be gratefully recognised for their bravery and remembered for being on the right side of history.

*“If the 2008 Olympics take place, then they should stand for freedom and peace. As a Tibetan, I have neither freedom nor peace. Therefore I don’t want these games.”*

A Tibetan monk, interviewed for the 2008 documentary film *Leaving Fear Behind*

# Recommendations

## Recommendations to heads of state and government officials

- Publicly commit to a diplomatic boycott of the 2022 Beijing Winter Games
- Where parliament has voted for a diplomatic boycott, acknowledge the vote and commit to acting on it
- State that they are boycotting the Winter Games due to the Chinese government's abuses against Tibetans, Uyghurs and other people under CCP rule
- Raise human rights abuses directly with their Chinese counterparts

## Recommendations to parliamentarians and representatives

- Raise ongoing abuses in Tibet and against other groups living under CCP rule through parliamentary and written questions
- Introduce motions in parliament calling for a diplomatic boycott of the 2022 Winter Olympics and encourage colleagues to support them
- Where parliament has voted for a diplomatic boycott, directly ask government officials what they are planning to do to act on this vote
- Publicly support calls for a diplomatic boycott of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics in speeches and on social media

## Recommendations to sports and Olympic associations

- Commit to a boycott of the 2022 Beijing Winter Games based on China's human rights record
- Publicly support any athletes who feel they cannot participate in the Beijing Games due to the Chinese government's human rights abuses

## Recommendations to athletes

- Commit to a boycott of the 2022 Beijing Winter Games based on China's human rights record
- Become familiar with human rights abuses in Tibet and against other peoples under CCP rule
- Should athletes travel to Beijing, we **advise against carrying out any form of protest**. As this report has detailed, China is a repressive regime and those carrying out public protests, criticising the Chinese government online or even sending critical private messages are at risk of reprisals

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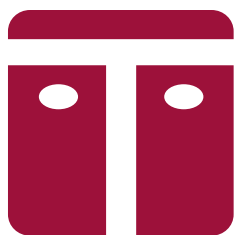
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## About Free Tibet

Free Tibet is a London-based international campaign organisation. Our vision is a free Tibet in which Tibetans are able to determine their own future and the human rights of all are respected. We campaign for an end to China's occupation of Tibet and for international recognition of Tibetans' right to freedom.

[www.freetibet.org](http://www.freetibet.org)



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## About Tibet Watch

Tibet Watch works to promote the human rights of the Tibetan people through monitoring, research and advocacy. We are a UK registered charity with an office in London and a field office in Dharamsala, India. We believe in the power of bearing witness, the power of truth.

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