

China Association for Preservation and Development of Tibetan Culture

Tremendous Changes in Tibet's Human Rights Situation over 50 Years

Tibet is an autonomous region of the Tibetan ethnicity of the People's Republic of China. In the long period before 1959, Tibet had been a society of feudal serfdom under theocracy and the dictatorship of the clergy and aristocracy. Serfs and slaves, who accounted for 95% of the population in Tibet, had no personal freedom and were deprived of their basic rights. The democratic reform of Tibet in 1959 put an end to the serfdom system and theocracy. A million serfs and slaves got the rights of a person. Tibet has since entered the new era of social development and human rights progress. Over the past 50 years, tremendous changes have happened in the economic, social and human rights situation in Tibet.

In the several hundred years before the 1950's, due to Tibet's special geographical location, the feudal serfdom and the constraint of Tibetan Buddhist doctrines over the monks, who made up most of the population, the population growth and economic and social development in Tibet were virtually at a standstill. The peaceful liberation of Tibet in 1951 and the democratic reform in 1959 provided good opportunities for development of Tibet and served as the fundamental reason for

population growth and improvement of the population quality and demographic structure. By the end of 2007, the total population of Tibet had reached 2.8415 million, among which 92% were Tibetans. The population natural growth rate was 11.3‰. So far life expectancy in Tibet has risen from 35.5 before the peaceful liberation to 67.

In recent years, Tibet has sustained rapid economic growth, with a GDP growth rate of over 12% in the past 7 years. GDP per capita has surpassed 12,000 yuan. Income per capita of peasants and herdsmen has reached 2,788 yuan, with a double-digit growth for 5 consecutive years. Before the 1950's, there was not a single road in Tibet. It would take half a year to walk from Chengdu, Sichuan to Tibet. By the end of 2007, the total highway traffic mileage in Tibet had reached 48,600 km. 89.6% of the villages had access to highway, 70% to mails and 100% to fixed-line phones. In July 2007, the Qinghai-Tibet railway was open to traffic, making the transport in Tibet even more convenient. Since 2005, the government has been implementing a housing project in Tibet. So far, over 110,000 households involving over 590,000 peasants and herdsmen have got new and comfortable houses. The free medical care system and the system of minimum living for the farming area and pastureland have benefited all peasants and herdsman. The urban medical insurance scheme has covered all cities and towns in the autonomous region.

Most Tibetans are believers of Tibetan Buddhism and currently there

are over 1700 sites for religious activities of Tibetan Buddhism, with over 46,000 monks and nuns residing in temples. The renowned Potala Palace, the Three Great Monasteries in Lhasa, the Tashilhunpo Monastery and the Jokhang Temple have been listed as key national cultural heritage protection sites. Various religions, religious sects and believers and non-believers in Tibet respect each other and live in harmony. The monks have established committees of democratic management through democratic elections to exercise independent management of religious affairs and arrange religious activities. The monks and nuns learn scriptures, have debates, and listen to the eminent monks at their discretion. Believers are free to pay tribute to Mount Kailash and Lake Mansarovar. Sutra streamers and Mani stone mounds put up by devout believers can be seen everywhere in Tibet. Inside and outside famous monasteries are crowds of worshipers either prostrating in prayer, turning their prayer wheels or bowing to Buddhist statues. Almost every religious family has a small sutra recitation hall or a niche for a Buddhist statue. This fully demonstrates that believers and laymen alike in Tibet have truly gained religious freedom and basic human rights.

Before the peaceful liberation, there was not a single school in a modern sense in Tibet. There were only some old-fashioned official schools and private schools for over 2000 monks and the noble class. Enrollment rate of school-age children was only 2%. The serfs and slaves

were deprived of their rights to education. And the illiteracy rate of young and middle-aged men was over 95%. So far, a complete modern education system has been established in the Tibet Autonomous Region. And the universality of education has been constantly increasing. By the end of 2006, there were 1021 schools at various levels in the autonomous region, including in-school students of 520,000. The enrollment rate of primary schools reached 98.2%, that of junior middle schools 90.7%. The elementary school and junior middle school students enjoy free boarding and accommodation as well as schooling. Education of improved quality is reaching more and more people.

Thanks to 50 years' efforts, there has been great progress in the Tibetan society. However, due to the weak foundation of economic and social development, high altitude, extreme cold and lack of oxygen, the economic and social development in Tibet still lags behind many other areas in China. And there is still room for improvement in the human rights situation in Tibet. We will continue to pay close attention to the economic and social development and the progress of human rights in Tibet.

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