



## China Orders Prayer Flags Taken Down in Tibet in an Assault on Culture, Faith

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Chinese policemen take down a pole with prayer flags in an unidentified region of Tibet.  
Photo from Tibet

Chinese authorities in Tibet have ordered the destruction of prayer flags in many parts of the region in one of China's most direct assaults to date on visible symbols of Tibetan culture and religious belief, sources in the region say.

The campaign, described as a program of “behavioral reform,” began in June in Qinghai's Golog (in Chinese, Guoluo) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture and in Tengchen (Dingqing) county in the Chamdo municipality of the Tibet Autonomous Region, a local source told RFA this week.

“Government officials and police have summoned the local people to meetings, ordering them to take part in what they called an environmental cleanup drive and movement of behavioral reform,” RFA's source said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

“Led by the police, local Tibetans are now taking down prayer flags in their villages and on the hilltops,” where they are traditionally hung in the belief that they will ward off evil and bring good luck, the source said.

Whether old or new, the prayer flags bearing mantras are all being removed from their traditional locations, the source said, adding that even the poles on which the flags were hung are being dismantled.

“This is an act of contempt and utter disregard for local Tibetans' customs and faith,” the source said, adding that he fears this new campaign will spread and encourage even more restrictions on traditional customs and religious practice.

“Chinese authorities in general have always vowed to eliminate any Tibetan behavior that they say will harm people's productivity and adversely affect their livelihood,” he said.

“Thus, the authorities have now set out to root out this Tibetan tradition of hanging prayer flags everywhere, directing local officials, the heads of monasteries, and relevant authorities at the district and township level to carry out the order.”

The campaign against flags came as annual review by the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy found that Chinese policies systematically wear away and destroy Tibetans' national and cultural identity, with a growing use of surveillance and online monitoring to suppress political dissent, and strengthened restrictions on Tibetan children's right to classroom instruction in their own language.

Throughout the year, Chinese police forces and surveillance teams moved into monasteries and villages to monitor Tibetan residents for signs of opposition to China's rule, the Dharamsala, India-based center said, adding, “facial-recognition software and careful monitoring of digital spaces [were] deployed to suppress political protests against the increased clampdowns on civil and political rights.”

***Reported by Lhuboom for RFA's Tibetan Service. Translated by Dorjee Damdul. Written in English by Richard Finney.***



FOCUS TIBET

## Tibeter müssen Gebetsfahnen entfernen



VON BE

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Eine Kampagne, die von den Behörden als «Reform des Verhaltens» benannt ist, zwingt Tibeter dazu, alle Gebetsfahnen zu entfernen. Das betrifft sämtliche Orte, an denen traditionell Gebetsfahnen wehen, wie Häuser, Klöster, oder auch Hügelkuppen. Diese Kampagne wurde im Juni in der Präfektur Golog in der Provinz Qinghai initiiert, danach auch im Bezirk Tengchen in Präfektur Chamdo; beide im Nordosten Tibets gelegen.

Wie Tibeter berichten, wurden sie von Regierungsvertretern und der Polizei zu Versammlungen einbestellt, in denen man ihnen die entsprechende Order erteilte. Alles wurde mit einer nicht näher bezeichneten «Säuberung der Umwelt» und «Reform des Verhaltens» begründet. Wie lokale Informanten an Radio Free Asia berichten, werden nicht nur Gebetsfahnen in den betroffenen Regionen entfernt, sondern auch die Masten, an denen sie aufgehängt waren.

*Radio Free Asia. 17. Juni 2020 // Dr. Uwe Meya*

Foto: Radio Free Asia