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PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF ALL HUMAN RIGHTS, CIVIL, POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS, INCLUDING THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT

**Written statement* submitted by the International Fellowship of Reconciliation
(IFOR), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is
circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 May 2008]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the
submitting non-governmental organization(s).

The Question of Religious Freedom in Tibet

1. For the past decade the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR) has reported regularly to the Human Rights Council on developments pertaining to the question of religious freedom in Tibet. During these years, the IFOR has focused on grave and systematic violations of the fundamental freedom of religion that have taken place as a result of concerted efforts on the part of Chinese authorities to control and suppress the religious practice of Tibetan Buddhist clergy and lay persons. These efforts have intensified since the beginning of the recent unrest in March 2008.

Background: The "Patriotic Education" Campaign 1996-2007

2. In April 1996, the Chinese government launched the "Strike Hard" campaign in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). Although the campaign in other parts of China was designed to combat crime and government corruption, it was directed in Tibet against "splittist" activity and focused on the suppression of political dissent in religious institutions.

3. A major instrument of control in connection with the campaign has been "patriotic education". The purpose of "patriotic education" has been to adapt Tibetan Buddhism to socialist norms and to enforce regulations governing the management of monasteries and convents and the registration of resident clergy. In practice, "patriotic education" is undertaken by work teams recruited from the Public Security Bureau, who visit religious institutions for extended periods of time and instruct the monks and nuns on the "proper" understanding of Tibetan religion and history. In the course of their stay, the teams strive to identify and expel those clergy members whom they deem unpatriotic and to exact loyalty pledges from the rest. The five point loyalty oath includes the acceptance of Tibet as an inalienable part of China, the recognition of the Chinese appointed Panchen Lama, and the denunciation of the Dalai Lama. The work teams also establish Democratic Management Committees (DMC) and local Religious Affairs Bureaus (RAB) whose task it is to monitor activities and to ensure that the regulations put in place by the work teams are carried out.

4. Although the initial "Strike Hard" campaign officially ended in July 1996, the campaign in Tibet continued under the guise of "patriotic education". In December 1997, the campaign was extended to lay communities with work teams operating in agricultural collectives, towns, cities, governmental bodies, and schools. In 1998, the campaign was extended beyond the TAR to Tibetan religious institutions and lay communities in Qinghai, Sichuan, and Gansu provinces. In 2000, the Chinese government announced that the "patriotic education" campaign has concluded. In 2001, however, the "Strike Hard" campaign was officially re-launched in the TAR and was extended to other Tibetan areas in China. "Patriotic education" has continued unabated since then.

5. Although few official statistics exist, evidence suggests that the campaign has been brutally effective. By February 1998, there were reports that almost four thousand monks and nuns had been expelled from religious institutions in the TAR alone, while almost three hundred clergy were arrested with 14 reported dead. The extension of the campaign to other Tibetan regions produced similar results. One extreme example of repression was reported in 2001 when more than seven thousand resident monks and nuns were expelled from the Serther Tibetan Buddhist Institute in Kardze Prefecture, Sichuan Province.

6. In all, “patriotic education” has involved systematic measures of repression and control over religious and lay communities, including restrictions on religious teaching and public worship, mandatory loyalty oaths, expulsions, arbitrary arrest and detention, interrogation by torture, even death.

Intensification of the Campaign in Response to the March 2008 Protests

6. Following the recent outbreak of protests across the Tibetan Plateau, the Chinese authorities have re-launched and intensified the “patriotic education” campaign with the stated goals of “vehemently opposing the ‘Dalai clique’” and of “exposing the true nature of the ‘Dalai clique’” and of the “14 March riots”. Given its urgency and focus, the current campaign represents a major thrust in efforts to break the bond of loyalty between the clergy and lay persons in Tibet and His Holiness the Dalai Lama in India

7. Under the supervision of Communist Party leaders, new committees were established to design and execute the renewed “patriotic education” campaign. Three areas of focus have been identified for the campaign: “opposing splittism”, “protecting stability”, and “backing development”. An operational plan has been drawn up which includes holding public meetings, at which experts will give speeches and the goals of the “patriotic education” campaign will be discussed, conducting denunciation sessions of the Dalai Lama (in the style of the Cultural Revolution), screening propaganda films, and teaching Chinese laws and regulations.

8. On 3 April, the State newspaper Tibet Daily announced that, in addition to an intensified security build-up, the Chinese authorities had taken measures to ensure more stringent ideological education “to build anti-separatist sentiment”. The TAR Communist Party chief, Zhang Qingli, was quoted as saying that efforts should be undertaken to focus on negative portrayals of Tibet prior to the Communist Chinese presence in the TAR and on continued vilification of what Beijing calls the Dalai Lama's secret campaign to split Tibet from China and to sabotage the Olympics. He went on to threaten harsh punishments for local party officials found lacking in their commitment to carry out this task: “We absolutely will not condone violations of political and organizational discipline and will definitely find those responsible and mete out harsh punishment”.

9. Such provocations, when officially sanctioned, do not take long to produce results. On the same day, on 3 April, monks of the Wara Monastery in Jomda County, Chamdo Prefecture, TAR confronted the “work team” sent to conduct the “patriotic education” campaign in their monastery by saying “even at the cost of our lives we will never defame and denounce our religious leader, the Dalai Lama”. Tragically, elsewhere on 3 April, at least eight people were shot dead and dozens left injured after monks of the Tongkor Monastery in Kardze County, Sichuan Province staged a peaceful demonstration calling for the release of two monks arrested the day before for objecting to the “patriotic education” campaign in their monastery.

10. A week later, on 11 April, the TAR authorities sent a “legal information work team” to the Drepung Monastery as a part of the “patriotic education” campaign, although the monks vehemently opposed the visit of a “work team”. Protests broke out and many monks were subsequently detained with no information on the condition and whereabouts of the detainees. Nevertheless, the Chinese official news agency, Xinhua, wrote on 11 April that a

patriotic education team had arrived at the monastery “to help maintain social stability and socialist legal institutions” and “to restore religious order”. The report even stated that the officials involved in the “patriotic education” campaign throughout Tibet “have received the understanding and support of monks and religious followers”.

11. Mr. Zhang Qingli reportedly visited the Drepung Monastery on 18 April 2008. On the same day, he also visited the Sera Monastery giving “assurance” to the monks that “the Communist Party committee and government of Tibet would protect the legal rights and interests of patriotic and devote monks and nuns”. Xinhua reported that Buddhist religious services have resumed after being suspended due to the Lhasa “riots”, but made no reference to the reported arrest of almost 400 monks in an early morning raid in Sera Monastery.

12. On 12 April, a special meeting was convened among the representatives of the various monastic institutions in all eighteen counties of Karze Prefecture, Sichuan Province at Dhartsedo with an order to commence the "patriotic education" campaign immediately in all religious institutions throughout Karze Prefecture. As a result, the Chinese authorities began a 'signature campaign' requiring Tibetans to vilify the Dalai Lama in Drango county (Chinese: Luhuo). It is reported that when one young farmer from Gephen Li-Khokma village refused to sign, he was so severely beaten that he had to be hospitalized and his current condition is unknown.

13. In the TAR, at least six monks in Nechung monastery, outside Lhasa, were detained after expressing their dissent to the patriotic education campaign. On April 19, one monk reportedly stood up during a “patriotic education” session and said that the monks did not need these classes, nor did they want to participate. Others reportedly joined in the protest. According to reliable sources, there may now be only a handful of monks still remaining at the Nechung monastery following this protest.

14. Further reports of protest and arbitrary arrests in connection with the renewed “patriotic education” campaign were received from the Shi-Tsang Gatsel monastery in Luchu (Chinese: Luqu) county, Kanlho (Chinese: Gannan) Prefecture in Gansu province. In late April, armed police raided the monastery and detained around 28 monks. The monastery was raided again in the early hours of the following morning and another four monks were taken into custody. It was also reported that an unknown number of monks were detained during a raid by armed police on the Choephel Tashi Chokor-Ling monastery in Dukhor town, Chone (Chinese: Zhuoni) county in Kanlho Prefecture.

15. On 14 May, following a protest in the Pang Na Tashi Gepheling Nunnery in Karze Prefecture, Sichuan Province, 55 nuns were detained. Sources report that the nuns were deeply upset and angered by the wanton arrest, torture, and killing of peaceful Tibetan protesters in many parts of Tibet. The nuns voiced their resentment against the ongoing "patriotic re-education" campaign, proclaiming that "It is better to die than to denounce, criticize, and attack the Dalai Lama or to sign official documents denouncing the Dalai Lama. If there is no place for us to worship and live, let us go somewhere else or die. If the Chinese authorities kill us, let us be killed. We have no regrets."

16. On 18 May, Tulku Phurbu Tsering Rinpoche, a highly regarded reincarnated lama of the Tehor Karze Monastery was arrested by Chinese security forces without stating any

reason. He is the chief spiritual preceptor and the head of Pang-ri and Ya-tseg nunneries in Karze Prefecture. He is a charismatic figure who has been a source of inspiration for Tibetans through his social work like building an old age orphanage and opening chemist shops for the local Tibetans.

17. This brief overview of past and recent events suggests that the “patriotic education” campaign has been introduced by the Chinese authorities as an instrument of repression of Tibetan religious belief and practice. In light of the renewed intensity of the campaign, many observers have described the policies adopted by China towards Tibetans accompanied by the military crackdown as reminiscent of the Cultural Revolution.

In conclusion, the IFOR would like to call upon the members of the Council to take the following measures:

- To impress upon the Chinese government the need for an immediate withdraw of the "patriotic education" campaign;
- To release those who been detained during the current campaign from detention and to provide measures for their physical, psychological, and material rehabilitation;
- To hold a special session which will take urgent and concrete measures to ensure the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Tibet, including by calling upon the Chinese authorities to receive the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief on a follow-up mission.

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