

Statement by Enghebatu Togocho

CECC Hearing

Growing Constraints on Language and Ethnic Identity in Today's China

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INTRODUCTION

My name is Enghebatu Togocho. I am a Mongolian from Southern Mongolia, widely known as “Inner Mongolia.” Southern Mongolia is home to six million Mongolians, a population that is twice as large as that of the independent country of Mongolia. In 1949, Southern Mongolia was officially annexed to the People’s Republic of China, becoming the first so-called “Nationality Minority Autonomous Region.”

Over the past 73 years, praised as the “model autonomy,” Southern Mongolia has served as the de facto testing ground of China’s ethnic policies. These include genocide, ethnic cleansing, political purge, economic exploitation, cultural eradication, linguistic assimilation, social marginalization, resource extraction, and environmental destruction, as detailed below.

As early as the late 1940s, before the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, Southern Mongolia was occupied by the Chinese Communist forces and was subjected to the so-called “Land Reform Movement.” Mongolian land was effectively confiscated and distributed to the Chinese, and tens of thousands of Southern Mongolians were executed as “herd-lords.”

During the 1950s, at least 20,000 Southern Mongolians elite intellectuals were persecuted as “national rightists” for demanding the materialization of “nationality autonomy” that the Chinese Communist government promised to Southern Mongolia.

From the late 1960s through the early 1970s, Southern Mongolia had experienced a large-scale genocide campaign carefully designed by the Chinese Central Government and carried out by the People’s Liberation Army and Chinese settlers. At least 100,000 Southern Mongolians were tortured to death, and a half million were persecuted. One third of the Southern Mongolian population was affected by this genocide of an unprecedented scale.

In the early 1980s, the Chinese Central Government accelerated the process of Chinese migration to Southern Mongolia. As a result, in 1981, a large-scale student movement broke out across Southern Mongolia. After a three-month-long, region-wide student protest, the Chinese Government cracked down on the students and arrested, detained, and imprisoned the student leaders and supporters.

In the early 1990s, Southern Mongolian intellectuals established a number of underground organizations protesting Chinese occupation and demanding national freedom. All of them were harshly crushed by the Chinese authorities. In 1995, one such organization—the Southern

Mongolian Democratic Alliance (SMDA), which aimed to achieve the total independence of Southern Mongolia and ultimately to merge with the independent country of Mongolia—was declared as a “national separatist organization.” The president and the vice president of the organization, Mr. Hada and Mr. Tegexi, were arrested and sentenced to 15 years and 10 years in jail, respectively, on charges of “separatism and espionage.” Nearly 70 other members were arrested, detained, and sent to jail for periods ranging from 3 months to a year. Mr. Hada is still under house arrest today after serving 15 years of imprisonment and an additional 4-year extrajudicial detention.

In 2001, China started a fresh crusade against the traditional Mongolian nomadic way of life. Two sets of policies, namely the “Ecological Migration” and the “Livestock Grazing Ban,” were introduced to forcibly displace the entire Mongolian herder population from their ancestral lands to overwhelmingly Chinese-populated urban and agricultural areas. These displaced herders became homeless, jobless and landless. The Mongolian pastoralist way of life and nomadic civilization were effectively wiped out. Southern Mongolians consider this as a critical step in China’s overall cultural genocide in Southern Mongolia.

According to the Chinese Central Government State Council announcement published on its website in May 2012, by the end of 2015, China would resettle the remaining nomad population of 246,000 households, or 1.157 million nomads, within the borders of China. This means by the end of 2015, the millennium-old nomadic civilization was officially put to an end in China.

In 2009, the Chinese Central Government announced that Southern Mongolia would become “China’s largest energy base.” Chinese extractive industries, including major state-run mining corporations and thousands of ninja miners, rushed into Southern Mongolia.

In May 2011, a region-wide protest broke out in Southern Mongolia, sparked by the brutal killing of a Mongolian herder who defended his land from coal miners. Tens of thousands of students took to the street supporting the wide-spread herders’ protest across the region. The Chinese authorities responded with riot police and paramilitary forces to put down the uprising. Hundreds were arrested, detained, and jailed. Resource extraction and environmental destruction were not halted, but only exacerbated.

ONGOING CULTURAL GENOCIDE

As the last phase of the cultural genocide campaign, in June 2020, the Chinese Central Government announced that it would implement the “Second Generation Bilingual Education,” a new euphemism for the renewed attack on Mongolian culture. The goal of the new policy is clear: wipe out Mongolian language, culture, and identity and turn Southern Mongolia into a homogenous, worry-free Chinese society.

In response to this, starting in late August 2020, the Southern Mongolians carried out a region-wide nonviolent resistance movement. The entire Southern Mongolian populace stood up to the Chinese regime. From kindergarteners to college professors, from ordinary herders to prominent scholars, from party members to government employees, from artists to athletes, from lawyers to police officers, from taxi drivers to delivery men, all walks of life of Southern Mongolian society

took part in the protest in one way or another. At least 300,000 Mongolian students went on a total school strike. The Chinese authorities harshly cracked down on the movement. An estimated 8,000–10,000 Southern Mongolians have been arrested, detained, jailed, and placed under house arrest. Eleven Southern Mongolians lost their lives in defense of the right to use their mother tongue.

What followed this heavy-handed crackdown was a full-scale and full-speed cultural genocide campaign, the scope of which has extended far beyond the simple switch of medium of instruction from Mongolian to Chinese in schools.

On January 1, 2021, all government mouthpieces, including the Inner Mongolia Radio and Television Mongolian language services, were ordered to start replacing Mongolian cultural programs with Chinese ones in order to promote “the strong sense of Chinese (zhong hua) nationality common identity.”

“Learn Chinese and become a civilized person” has been an official slogan publicly promoting Chinese supremacy over Mongolian language, culture, and identity. Slogans of “mutual interaction, mutual exchange and mutual assimilation of all ethnic groups to firmly establish the Chinese nationality common identity” have been aired repeatedly from television and radio stations across the region.

In schools, Mongolian students are subjected to military-style training and propaganda activities. Mongolian college students are forced to wear Mao suits and sing Communist “red” songs to extol the greatness of China. Mongolian teachers and professors are brought to the Chinese Communist red-base Yan’an to receive patriotic education.

In a move to justify the total elimination of Mongolian languages from the entire educational system in Southern Mongolia, the Chinese National Congress announced recently that “education in minority languages as local legislations stipulated is unconstitutional,” according to the Chinese official press *People’s Daily*. This overwrites Article 4 of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China, which states, “All ethnicities have the freedoms and rights to use and develop their own spoken and written languages and to preserve or reform their own folkways and customs.”

Local authorities in the Autonomous Region reacted promptly to implement this directive. Classes on Mongolian culture and history taught in Mongolian in local schools are considered to be “underemphasizing the Chinese nationality common identity and deliberately overemphasizing [an] individual ethnic group’s ‘ethnic identity’ and ‘ethnic sentiment,’” and hence are removed from the curriculum across the region.

In an effort to completely block all avenues of learning Mongolian, on January 9, 2021, the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region Department of Education issued a document banning “any school from gathering students to offer extracurricular learning courses or teaching new courses. It strictly prohibited middle and elementary school teachers from organizing or participating in any training organizations outside the campus or any paid make-up courses organized by teachers, parents and parents’ committees, or inducing students to participate in any paid make-up courses

organized by themselves or others; introducing student sources and providing relevant information to any training organization outside the school campus is strictly prohibited,” according to *Xin Lang Wang*, one of Chinese official presses.

Flagrant cultural annihilation is most visible in the series of arts and cultural performances put together by the Chinese authorities for the Mongolian Tsagaan Sar, the traditional Mongolian new year. Peking operas have replaced the traditional Mongolian art performance in TV programs. In some programs, traditional Mongolian dances have been converted to hybrid ones that exhibit full features of Chinese operas. The horse-head fiddle, a traditional Mongolian musical instrument, has been played in concert with the suona, a distinctively high-pitched instrument often played in Chinese traditional music ensembles.

The most sacred Mongolian sites, like Oboo, a stone altar devoted to the worship of Eternal Sky and local gods, have also been targeted by this campaign. Chinese traditional performers like Yangge dancers have frequently shown up on Oboo sites to mock the Mongolian Oboo ritual ceremony.

Sculptures of Mongolian historical figures have been taken down and smashed; signs in Mongolian have been removed from schools, buildings, streets, and parks. The latest footage we received shows that a group of construction workers are removing the Mongolian letters from the official sign of the Hohhot City People’s Procuratorates in the regional capital. In another photo, a group of Mongolian students stand next to a sign in Mongolian at their school entrance; the sign is scheduled to be removed on the next day.

Mongolian publications are banned altogether, and Mongolian books are taken down from bookstore shelves. Printing and copy services on the street are ordered not to provide services of printing and copying any materials in Mongolian. Postal and courier services are instructed not to deliver any Mongolian books and publications.

On the official front, a region-wide intensive training program was launched. According to the Inner Mongolia News official website, the first session of the Region-wide Educational System Special Training for the Firm Inculcation of the Chinese Nationality Common Identity started on December 8, 2020. Although the exact details of the training and the total number of trainees remain unknown, the report confirmed a three-phase training program will be completed by the end of March 2021. Other regional and local news revealed that the synchronized training sessions were held in all schools, colleges, and universities throughout the Autonomous Region.

A 47-page internal document entitled “Propaganda Pamphlet for Inculcating the Chinese Nationality Common Identity to Push for the Usage of Nationally Compiled Textbook and National Common Language Education” was issued by the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region Department of Education in January 2021. According to a trainee who asked not to be identified, all the lectures, discussions, reflections, and quizzes are centered on this document.

Quoting Xi Jinping’s remarks, the document “urges the masses to communicate and train together to take up the work of interfusing the feelings, to strive hard to create a social condition of living together, learning together, working together and enjoying together, and urges all ethnic

groups to accept the great mother country, Chinese nationality, Chinese culture, Chinese Communist Party and the socialism with Chinese characteristics.” The document also warns the Southern Mongolians that “the wrong path of narrow nationalism can easily lead to the return of separatist tendency.”

Another trainee who managed to leave China and arrived in the United States recently told us that he and all of his Mongolian coworkers were forced to receive this training for two months. During the training, they had to denounce their “narrow nationalism” and “nationalistic feeling” and embrace the “Chinese nationality common identity.” They were required to provide all of their social contacts and the details of their social media activities to the authorities. Toward the end of the training, they were forced to confess their supposed “mistakes,” including their past gatherings where they wore Mongolian traditional clothes and sung Mongolian songs. They were warned that these mistakes went against the spirit of “Chinese nationality common identity.” They had to answer multiple questionnaires designed to assess their “ideological improvement.” One of the questions, the trainee said, was, “How many Chinese friends do you have?” Those who answered “none” or “few” participated in extended trainings before they were qualified to “graduate.” Before the release, all trainees signed a paper promising that they would not engage in any activities highlighting “Mongolian characteristics” or expressing “nationalistic feeling.”

From what is happening to the Uyghurs and what is happening to the Mongolians and Tibetans, it is apparent that the Chinese authorities are engaging in different forms of genocide campaigns on multiple fronts. While in East Turkistan, millions of Uyghurs and other Muslim peoples are locked up in concentration camps, in Southern Mongolia, a full-scale cultural genocide campaign is taking place. In Tibet, a similar campaign has been launched to eradicate the unique Tibetan culture and religious belief. Whatever form the campaign may take, the ultimate goal of the Chinese authorities is the same: wipe out the language, culture, and identity of these three peoples and force them to adopt the so-called “zhong hua,” or, simply put, “Chinese” nationality. This goal is publicly stated and advertised by the Chinese Government across China.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the deteriorating human rights conditions in Southern Mongolia; China’s determination to erase the Mongolian language, culture, and identity; and the lack of support from the international community, I would like to make the following recommendations to the United States Congress:

1. Conduct further hearings and testimonies to investigate the gross human rights violations in Southern Mongolia, particularly the ongoing cultural genocide;
2. Establish a Mongolian language broadcast in Voice of America and/or Radio Free Asia to help Southern Mongolians to keep their language alive and establish a channel to the free and democratic world;
3. Introduce and pass a legislation similar to the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act and Tibet Policy and Support Act to support the six million Southern Mongolians in their efforts to defend their basic human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Thank you,

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