

US Secretary of State Expresses Concerns over Forced DNA Collection of Tibetans in Tibet

US State Secretary Antony Blinken has expressed concerns over the forced gathering of DNA from Tibetans in Tibet by China, according to a report by Phayul. Secretary Blinken has noted that reports of mass DNA collection in Tibet have emerged as an additional form of control and surveillance over the Tibetan population. The Secretary has further added that human genomic data access creates a whole new set of human rights concerns, as advances in biotechnology enable genomic surveillance based on a person's DNA, potentially leading to abuses.

Phayul's report stated that police in the Tibet Autonomous Region began a mass DNA collection program in June 2016, targeting men, women, and children throughout the region. The mass DNA collection campaign appears to be a form of social control directed against the Tibetan people, rather than being related to any ongoing criminal investigation. This was highlighted by civil society organization Citizens Lab.

Human Rights Watch, in a report released on September 5, 2021, mentioned that Chinese authorities were significantly increasing policing and arbitrary DNA collection from residents in many towns and villages throughout the Tibet Autonomous Region. The report also added that people could not refuse to provide their DNA samples, and police did not require credible evidence of any criminal conduct to demand them. A report from Lhasa municipality in April 2022 stated that blood samples for DNA collection were systematically collected from children at kindergartens and other residents. As per Phayul, a report from a Tibetan township in the so-called Qinghai province in December 2020 stated that DNA was being collected from all boys aged five and above.

Sophie Richardson, China director at Human Rights Watch, has expressed concern over the matter, noting that the Chinese government is already subjecting Tibetans to pervasive repression. She has further added that the authorities are taking blood without consent to strengthen their surveillance capabilities.

According to Phayul, a Citizen Lab report released in September 2022 claimed that the Chinese government had collected genetic material from almost a third of the population in Tibet, 1.2 million out of 3.6 million, without clearly obtaining consent from those involved. The CCP has used genetic materials collected from Uyghurs in East Turkestan (Ch. Xinjiang) to enhance its surveillance systems and forced ethnic change campaigns in the region.

The International Campaign for Tibet, an advocacy group, has denounced China's mass DNA collection campaign, noting that throughout its occupation of Tibet, China has used Tibet as

a laboratory for relentless methods of social control, including this horrific campaign of mass DNA collection.

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