



HUMAN
RIGHTS
WATCH

“They Say We Should Be Grateful”

Mass Rehousing and Relocation Programs in Tibetan Areas of China


Summary and Key Recommendations

Today I am living in new house with a comfortable life. I am so happy. All of my fortunes do not come from my prayers, but rather from the Communist Party.

—DEKYI, CHINA'S TIBET MAGAZINE, MARCH 2009

People in the village are desperate about abandoning their homes and having to resettle. They don't have any other skills than farming, and won't have any herds or land worth speaking of anymore. How is the next generation going to survive as Tibetans?

—HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH INTERVIEWEE FROM GYAMA (JIAMA),
TIBET AUTONOMOUS REGION, JULY 2012



“They Say We Should Be Grateful”

Mass Rehousing and Relocation Programs in Tibetan Areas of China



Local residents walk past a row of newly built houses at Jiangcun Village in Chushur (Qushui) County, Tibet Autonomous Region, January 2006.

© 2006 Associated Press

Since 2006, the Chinese government has implemented large-scale programs to “rehouse”—through renovation of existing houses or construction of new ones—a majority of the rural population of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) under a policy called “Comfortable Housing.” In parallel, the government has accelerated the relocation and sedentarization of nomadic herders in the eastern part of the Tibetan plateau, mostly in Qinghai province, and laid the ground for similar policies in other parts of the plateau. Both policies are a component of the government’s effort to “Build a New Socialist Countryside” in Tibetan areas, which the government says is designed to rapidly increase the living standards of rural Tibetans and boost the local economy.

The scale and speed at which the Tibetan rural population is being remodeled by these policies is unprecedented in the post-Mao era. According to official figures, under the Comfortable Housing policy, 2 million people—more than two-thirds of the entire population of the TAR—were moved into new houses or rebuilt their own houses between 2006 and 2012. Twenty percent of those rehoused between 2006 and 2010—about 280,000 people—had to be relocated, some nearby and others at a great distance. The government intends to rehouse 180,000 more by 2015.

In Qinghai province, on the eastern part of the Tibetan plateau, the government has relocated and settled 300,000 nomadic herders since the early 2000s under “Environmental Migration” schemes, and has said it intends to sedentarize 113,000 more by the end of 2013. By then, 90 percent of the herder population of the province will have been sedentarized. A chief aspect of the policy regarding herder communities, and one that upsets many Tibetans because of its impact on Tibetan culture, is that many of those rehoused or relocated have been sedentarized, moved off the land and into permanent structures.

The policy in Tibetan areas is being used as a template for relocating ethnic minority communities in other parts of the country; in June 2011 the central government instructed all provincial units, including the TAR, Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu, Inner-Mongolia, and Xinjiang, to complete by the end of 2014 all ongoing relocation programs for hundreds of thousands of nomadic herders.



The Chinese government asserts that all relocation and rehousing operations are entirely voluntary and respect “the will of the Tibetan farmers and herders.” It strongly denies that any forced evictions take place in the process, and suggests it is being culturally sensitive by stating that the design and appearance of the new houses suit “ethnic characteristics.” The government also claims that all those



Plans for new apartments, Nagchu (Naqu),
Tibet Autonomous Region.

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A shepherd follows his flock of sheep outside
Samye Monastery, near Lhasa.

© 2001 Steve McCurry/Magnum Photos



who have moved to new houses are satisfied and grateful for the improvement in their living conditions, and stories highlighting the gratitude of rehoused Tibetans since 2006 have become a prominent theme in state media in Tibetan areas.

But Tibetans coming from both farming and herding communities interviewed by Human Rights Watch between 2005 and 2012 say that large numbers of people relocated or rehoused did not do so voluntarily and that they were never consulted or offered alternatives. They say that many face financial difficulties as a result of having to move, reduce their herds, or demolish and reconstruct their houses. They claim that new settlements are sometimes inferior to the ones they previously inhabited and that many promises made to them by local officials to induce them to move have never materialized.

Despite the variety of situations, interviewees from both communities have reported a host of common issues associated with the New Socialist Villages policy. These common issues include:

- The involuntary character of many relocation and rehousing programs;
- The absence of genuine prior consultation with affected communities;
- The lack of meaningful avenues for challenging or seeking remedies for wrongful eviction orders;
- Inadequate and opaque compensation mechanisms;
- Problems with the quality of houses in which communities are resettled or rehoused;
- Increased financial burdens and indebtedness resulting from relocation and/or reconstruction of housing; and
- The loss of tangible and intangible assets and dissolution of communities.

Some of the problems identified by the Tibetans interviewed for this report, such as increased living costs, indebtedness, loss of assets, and the profound alteration of community structures, raise concerns about the sustainability of China's mass relocation and rehousing policies, especially once the tide of initial subsidies and investments from the central government recedes. For sedentarized or resettled nomadic communities, irreversible dislocation and marginalization are already observable, a fact that even official media are starting to occasionally acknowledge. Underlying all the concerns identified above are fears among Tibetans that these policies will erase their distinct culture and way of life.

This report describes the Chinese government's relocation of Tibetans as "forcible", not because we have evidence that officials are using physical force to remove residents from their old homes, but because they are offering them no alternatives. Under international law, the term "forced eviction" does not require the physical removal of residents from their homes. It also applies to evictions that lack meaningful consultation and compensation, or in which no alternatives to relocation have been presented. Chinese



New housing blocks in Dongkar (Dongga) township, villages 2 & 3, Tibet Autonomous Region.

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government relocation and rehousing policies and practices effectively compel communities to follow government orders or—in the case of nomadic communities—to move into fixed settlements through policies that are presented as having the force of law.

Interviewees told Human Rights Watch that that they see the remodeling of their villages as designed in part to facilitate the Chinese government’s control of Tibetans, who already face sharp curbs on political, religious, and cultural expression imposed in the name of combatting ethnic separatist sentiment. Such fears have been heightened since the announcement in 2011 that the TAR government was planning to dispatch over 20,000 Party and government cadres to be stationed in Tibetan villages, to “live, eat and work” with the local population, “maintain stability,”

“conduct propaganda work,” and “further the Comfortable Housing policy.”

Tibetans interviewed by Human Rights Watch also said that in many cases they are in effect being forced to trade poor but stable livelihood patterns for the uncertainties of a cash economy in which they are often the weakest actors.

While the Chinese government has consistently rejected all criticisms and expressions of concerns leveled against its rehousing and relocation policies, labeling them as “politically motivated,” some official reports, as well as Chinese-language academic studies, do acknowledge the existence of significant shortcomings. For instance, in 2009, an inspection team from the State Development and Reform Commission of the State Council issued a report detailing defects in the implementation of the Comfortable Housing policy in the TAR that closely matched what Tibetans



New housing blocks in Dongkar (Dongga) township, villages 4, 5 & 6, Tibet Autonomous Region.

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interviewed by Human Rights Watch reported. The problems listed by the report include the “lack of rational design” for new houses, housing designs that ignore the actual needs of the rural population, waste of construction material for renovation, and increasing risks that households will default on the bank loans contracted to fund the renovation or rebuilding of their houses. The State Council report acknowledges that some communities have been separated from the herds and livestock that had previously helped guarantee their livelihood, and notes that some new settlements have been built on unsuitable and potentially dangerous sites.

Human Rights Watch also found compelling evidence in official policy documents and Chinese language academic studies that the households themselves bear the bulk of the costs of renovating or rebuilding their houses. Official figures

show that self-financing and mandatory bank loans tend to account for financing account for up to 75 percent of the cost of renovating or relocating, a considerable financial burden for many Tibetan households, especially poor ones. This is particularly remarkable because most government public pronouncements and official media accounts—from which ordinary Tibetans derive most of their knowledge of the Comfortable Housing policy—seem to deliberately obscure the importance of household contributions, instead painting a picture in which the government alone is responsible for “solving housing difficulties.”



Tibetan nomads riding on horseback,
Derchen (Taqing), Tibet Autonomous Region

© 2006 Michel Gounot/Godong/Panos





A tent village on an open plain by the river
in Jyekundo (Yushu) Prefecture
© 1999 Steve McCurry/Magnum Photos



A family in Kham sharing a moment.
© 1999 Steve McCurry/Magnum Photos





Elderly Khampini nomad makes butter milk tea inside her yak tent.
Chang Tang Plateau, Central Tibet.

© 2008 Thomas L. Kelly



Khampa nomad's yak tent and their cattle.
Chang Tang Plateau, Central Tibet.

© 2008 Thomas L. Kelly





A hamlet in Nyalam (Nielamu) county, Tibet Autonomous Region.
© 1998 Katia Buffetrille



Khetsar village, Aba Prefecture.

© 1986 Katia Buffetrille



New housing on the edge of Lhasa.

© 2006 PG/Magnum Photo



“BUILDING A NEW SOCIALIST COUNTRYSIDE”

The establishment of what the government calls “New Socialist Villages”—villages built or remodeled according to a precise set of government standards—is a core aspect of the campaign to build a “New Socialist Countryside” in Tibetan areas. While the campaign includes sometimes overlapping policies that are implemented differently from place to place, it is nonetheless possible to distinguish two broad policy streams that are being used to pressure Tibetans to move out of their traditional habitat into new or remodeled New Socialist Villages.

- The first stream is composed of the various programs that fall under the rubric of “Comfortable Housing” (*anju gongcheng*). Under this policy, rural Tibetans whose dwellings are deemed unsuitable by the authorities are instructed to destroy and rebuild their houses according to strict government standards, either on the same spot or in new settlements often placed alongside existing or newly built roads. Under this scheme, the cost of construction or reconstruction of the new homes is met by a combination of state subsidies, bank loans, prior savings, and other household assets. This policy is chiefly implemented in the TAR, where it was introduced in 2006, but has been extended to areas in the eastern part of the Tibetan plateau. The term “Comfortable Housing” has over time become used by the government to refer to any policy that aims to improve the living conditions of the Tibetan population, and embraces other issues such as transportation, electrification, and provision of health services.
- The second stream of policies comprises various sedentarization or resettlement schemes aimed at nomadic herder communities. Under so-called “Environmental Migrations” policy schemes, nomadic herder communities must leave the grasslands and relocate to new concentrated settlements, often in the periphery of small towns, and to reduce or sell their livestock. These schemes are chiefly implemented in eastern Tibet (Qinghai province). Human Rights Watch is unaware of any policies in the TAR or in Tibetan areas of Sichuan province that forces herder communities to sedentarize permanently, although the government encourages them to do so by building permanent habitations for them.



Severe pollution in a waterway near a newly built settlement, Qinghai Province.

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In addition to the significant variations between the TAR and eastern Tibet in the building of the New Socialist Countryside, there are also significant disparities in how these policies are implemented from place to place within the same provincial unit. The degree of coercion and scale of rights violations also vary considerably from place to place.

Interviews by Human Rights Watch suggest that some segments of the Tibetan population have benefitted from relocation or rehousing, including many local Tibetan government cadres, entrepreneurs and their families, as well as ordinary villagers. In some parts of the Tibetan plateau, substantial economic growth and new signs of prosperity are visible, spurred by a combination of state subsidies, massive infrastructure investments, expansion of urban centers and

markets, rising demand for local medicinal products, and also by construction-related activities. Many Tibetans aspire to better living conditions and welcome many aspects of modernization.

Some Tibetans have genuinely welcomed aspects of the housing policies and benefited from them, yet many are concerned about their ability to maintain their livelihood over time. The majority consider themselves targets of policies they are powerless to oppose or affect.



Heavy machinery moves dirt from the side of a mountain, during the construction of a new road in southern Qinghai Province.

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Official Explanations

The Chinese government has advanced several explanations for policies mandating large-scale rehousing or relocation. The overarching explanation is the long-standing official policy of “helping Tibet” (yuan Zang), which the government says is aimed at rapidly improving the livelihood of the Tibetan population. The government stresses that its relocation and rehousing policies provide Tibetans with better housing, electricity, water, transportation, schooling, healthcare, protection against natural disasters, and foster a rapid transition to the cash economy. According to the central government, these steps offer a chance for economically backward ethnic minorities to take part in the modernization and economic development of the region and nation.

The government also cites several other objectives, including the acceleration of the exploitation of the Tibetan plateau’s natural resources and the implementation of the national Western Development campaign, launched in 2000, which aims at reducing economic disparities between the poorer Western provinces and the rest of China, in part by accelerating urbanization. In respect to herders, it consistently points to the necessity of protecting the fragile ecosystem of the Tibetan-Qinghai plateau by removing herder communities from fragile grasslands whose degradation, the government argues, is mainly caused by over-grazing.



Old houses being dismantled at Garpa, Tibet Autonomous Region.

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A Context of Rising Tensions

Many of the issues documented in this report echo the problems documented in a June 2007 Human Rights Watch report which focused more narrowly on the resettlement of Tibetan herders in the eastern part of the Tibetan plateau (Qinghai province in general and the Three Rivers Area in particular). The 76-page report, “We Have No Liberty to Refuse,” concluded that the resettlement campaign to move Tibetan herders had often been conducted without consultation or adequate compensation and carried significant risks of impoverishment for the affected communities as a result of loss of traditional livelihoods.

In researching the current report, we found that many of the concerns we raised in 2007 about herder communities have been borne out: the unsustainability of the new settlements, deteriorating living conditions for many, and greater uncertainty about the future. A number of official Chinese-language studies have also come to the same conclusions, and several of those studies are excerpted or summarized in this report. Some Chinese analysts have even expressed concern about the “rash” character of resettlement policies, pointing to a long list of adverse and unforeseen difficulties faced by previously relocated communities. Other studies detail the considerable difficulties faced by newly relocated Tibetans, who have been deprived of their traditional livelihood resources but remain too marginalized to engage in

alternative income-generating activities. Many are unable to compete with an increased flow of Chinese migrants from the rest of the country, while insufficient infrastructure and the flaws in the quality of housing settlements become increasingly apparent over time.

The New Socialist Villages campaign also has larger implications for the relationship between Tibetans and the Chinese state. Human Rights Watch's 2007 report pointed to several studies by Chinese scholars who warned that frictions resulting from ill-thought relocation policies "could severely influence the social and political stability" of the region and evolve into ethnic unrest. It is unclear how much dissatisfaction over mandatory relocation and rehousing policies contributed to the large-scale protests that rippled across the Tibetan plateau in 2008, the largest wave of popular protests in two decades (the subject of "I Saw It with My Own Eyes," a Human Rights Watch report published in July 2010).

The 2008 protests did not lead to a reappraisal of policies towards Tibetans, including mass relocation and rehousing policies. Since that time, the government has actually accelerated its mass relocation and rehousing efforts, and increased political and religious restrictions. In August 2011, the central government announced that it intended to expedite and expand its relocation and rehousing policies beyond the Tibetan areas, and sedentarize most of the remaining nomadic communities by 2015, including Kazakh and Kyrgyz communities in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region and Mongols in Inner Mongolia. This is similar to the government's response to the wave of Tibetan self-immolations that followed the suppression of the 2008 protests: adopting progressively tougher rhetoric and repressive measures while refusing to consider any key policy changes.

To date, the Chinese government has given no indication that it will accommodate the apparent aspirations of Tibetan people for greater autonomy, even within the narrow confines of the country's autonomy law on ethnic minorities' areas. Instead, because it views Tibetans' distinct culture as a potential vehicle for ethno-nationalist aspirations, the Chinese state has undertaken a series of efforts, through political suppression and economic modernization, to remodel Tibetan society in a way that guarantees China's long term "cultural security."

As a result, Tibetans suspected of being critical of official political, religious, cultural, or economic policies are systematically targeted and accused of "separatism," disruption of public order, or other crimes. Most people interviewed for this report said they were afraid to challenge the massive relocation or rehousing campaigns, since they are portrayed by the government as major political decisions to which opposition is not an option.



New housing, Nagchu (Naqu) Prefecture, Tibet Autonomous Region.

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Looking Ahead

The Chinese government has deliberately obscured the full impact of its policies by refusing to allow any independent fact-finding investigations in Tibetan areas. Closed at the best of times to human rights investigations, access to the Tibetan plateau, especially to the TAR, has remained extremely limited for academics, journalists, diplomats, and even foreign tourists since the 2008 protests and the ensuing crackdown. Tight censorship on Tibetan and minority issues effectively prevent objective domestic monitoring.

Relocation and rehousing policies are often cited by government officials as an integral part of larger political objectives such as combating ethno-national or "separatist" sentiment among Tibetans. National and regional authorities point to material advances in the livelihood of Tibetans in recent decades as evidence of the legitimacy of Chinese rule over Tibet. They also celebrate the ways these policies facilitate the progressive "homogenization of the Chinese nation," inculcating loyalty for the Communist Party and the government among Tibetans, and strengthening overall national security. In practice, officials often conflate criticism of state policies with a threat to national security.

These factors help explain why activism on housing rights in other parts of China has been on the rise, but is strikingly absent in Tibetan areas. Protests in Tibetan areas are almost systematically labeled as anti-state or inspired by a "separatist" agenda and immediately suppressed. Without an independent judiciary to turn to, Tibetans told Human Rights Watch that in practice the law is little other than what officials say it is. Tibetan communities are effectively powerless in lawfully opposing or negotiating against relocation and rehousing orders.



A Tibetan woman digging a hole in the relocation town of Thunte (Tongde), Qinghai Province.

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Implementation of policies that are overtly aimed at refashioning rural Tibetan society has the potential to exacerbate an already volatile political situation in Tibetan areas. The semi-permanent garrisoning of large numbers of troops on the plateau since 2008, as well as the introduction of new social control mechanisms—dispatching thousands of party cadres to be stationed in villages, permanently posting government cadres inside Tibetan monasteries, and deploying new party structures tasked with monitoring households in urban areas—amply illustrate the concern of the Chinese government about the widespread dissatisfaction of the Tibetan population.

The official presentation of the policy of building of a New Socialist Countryside in Tibetan areas as a way to establish

“long term peace and stability” (*changzhi jiu’an*) over China’s borderlands might also be an indication that Beijing believes such strategic goals override short-term risks of unrest. But forging ahead with mass relocation and rehousing programs in a broadly repressive environment may create an even more incendiary situation that could explode as it did in 2008, and create an irreparable rift between Tibetans and the Chinese state.

Such tensions would be significantly decreased by suspending mass rehousing and relocation policies until the Chinese government commits to carrying them out consistent with international human rights standards on economic, social, and cultural rights, particularly with respect to the right to livelihood and housing rights.

Above all, in order to ensure that Tibetan households are genuinely voluntarily agreeing to be rehoused or relocated, the government must establish credible consultation mechanisms that spell out the legal rights of households targeted by these programs and the legal avenues available to



them under Chinese law to defend them. These consultations must truthfully inform targeted households about the economic implications and financial cost entailed by Comfortable Housing schemes, where households typically end up having to finance up to 70 percent of the cost of rehousing. To ensure that these consultation mechanisms are meaningful, the government must depoliticize the nature of rehousing and relocation programs, delinking them from its “anti-separatism” agenda and guaranteeing that criticisms of or opposition to these programs will not be construed or prosecuted as “inciting national disunity,” “fanning ethnic separatism,” “disrupting public order,” or other criminal charges regularly leveled against Tibetans who speak out against government policies.

The government should also quickly suspend all relocations of herding communities. Mounting scientific evidence is calling into question the government’s justification for removing herders from their pastures, and empirical research on relocated communities indicates that the schemes to

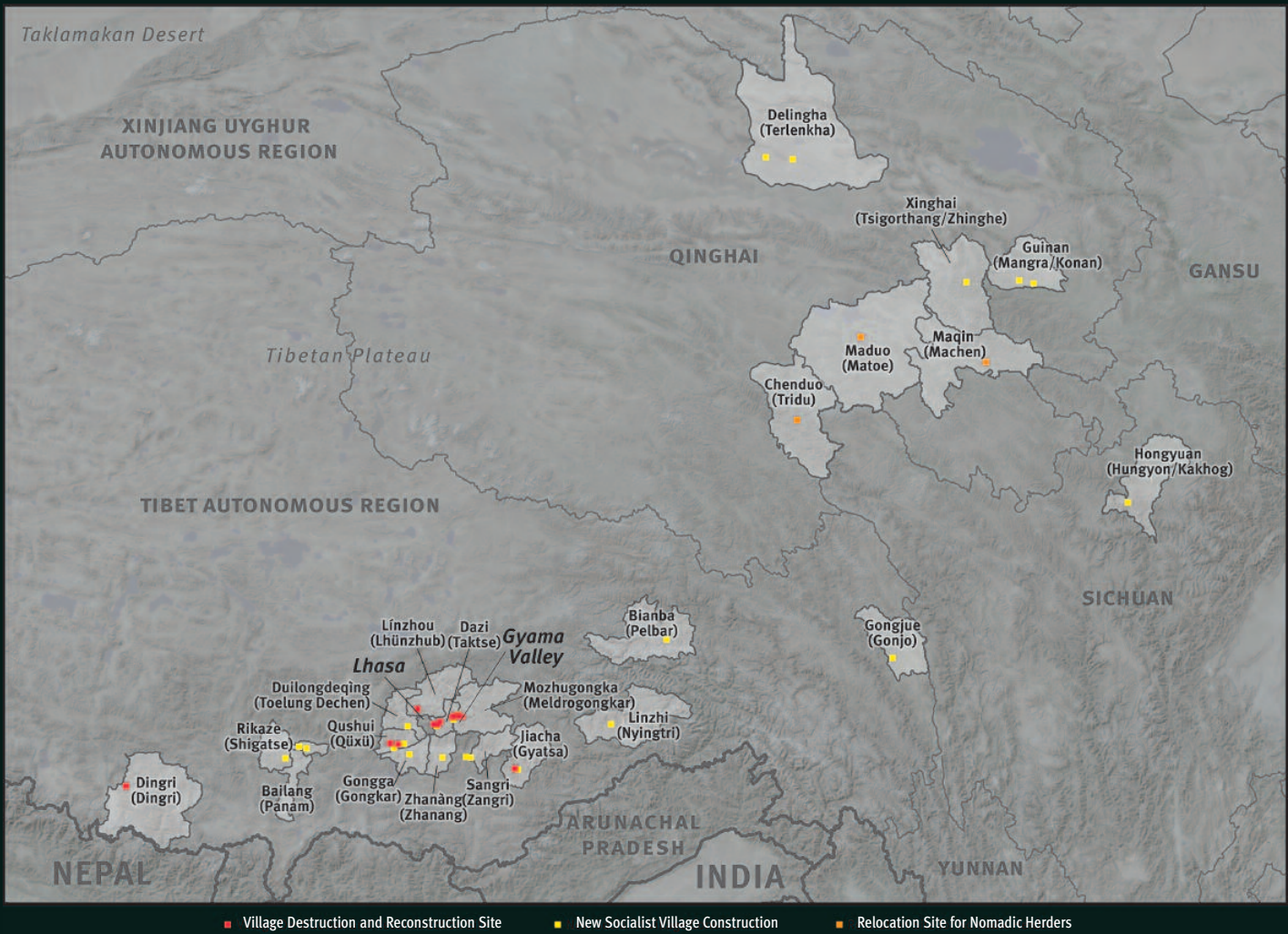
A Tibetan girl dressed in traditional dress posing for Chinese tourists, next to Qinghai Lake.

© 2010 Sean Gallagher

successfully help transition communities from seasonal nomadism to sedentarization are failing. Where overgrazing is genuinely a factor of pasture degradation, the government should, in consultation with local communities, design solutions so as to reduce herd size or expand grazing areas, but sedentarization should always remain voluntary.

Defusing larger political tensions in Tibetan areas requires that the government address long-standing grievances. It should implement the autonomy statutes listed in the PRC Autonomy Law in a way that actually devolves substantial policymaking power to Tibetans, including over economic and cultural matters, in line with relevant international legal standards.

“NEW SOCIALIST COUNTRYSIDE” REHOUSING AND RELOCATION SITES: SELECTED CASES



Case 1: Bagkarshol (Bagaxue), Taktse (Dazi) county 2004
 29°41'49.55" N 91°25'42.04" E



Bagkarshol (Bagaxue), Taktse (Dazi) county 2009



Case 3: In Nyanmo township (Nianmuxiang),
Namling (Nanmulin) county
29°19'21.78" N 89°24'37.49" E



Case 4: Mintse (Minze),
Nedong (Naidong) county
29°15'57.81" N 91°52'43.41" E



Case 5: Kiangchung (Guangqiong),
Gongkar (Gongga) county
29°17'09.78" N 91°00'05.24" E



Case 6: In Tsigorhang (Xinghai) county
35°33'56.76" N 99°59'05.35" E



Case 7: In Duilongdeqing
(Toelung Dechen) county
29°39'39.80" N 90°57'43.82" E



Case 8: Settlement for relocated nomads,
Matoe (Maduo) county
34°53'30.00" N 98°12'50.13" E



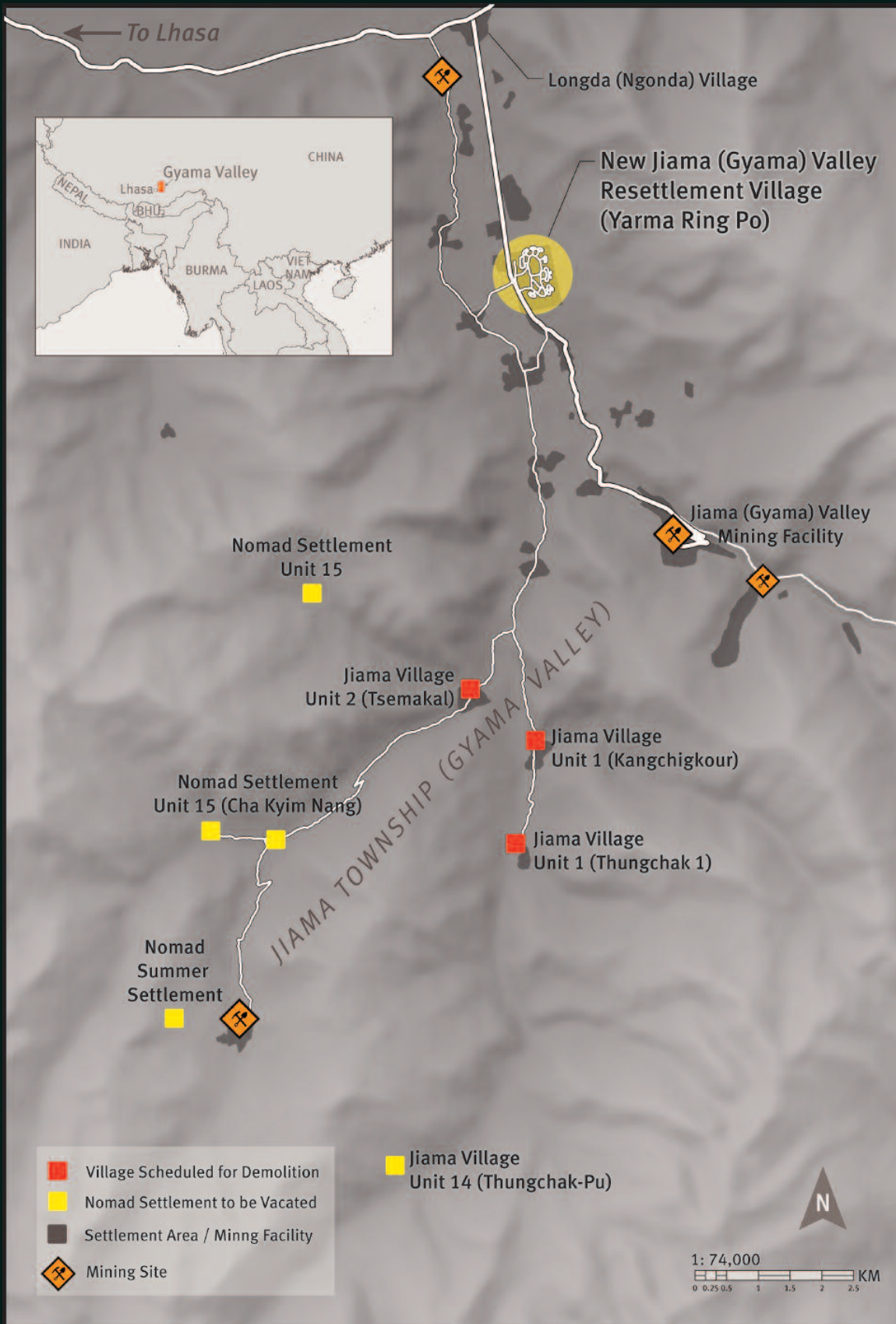
Case 2: Drupshe (Xiezhawo), Taktse (Dazi) county 2009
29°43'59.37" N 91°27'45.59" E



Drupshe (Xiezhawo), Taktse (Dazi) county 2012

All photos © 2013 DigitalGlobe. Source: Google Earth

IN FOCUS: GYAMA (JIAMA) VALLEY



“They told my village that everyone had to leave their old homes and move to the new houses [in the resettlement village] by September 2012, and that refusal to do so would be considered as “a political issue.” Everybody knows what this means: you’re risking a minimum of three years in prison.”

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH INTERVIEW WITH TENZIN GYALTSO, A VILLAGER FROM GYAMA (JIAMA),
TIBET AUTONOMOUS REGION, JUNE 2012.



Jiama Village Unit 2 (Tsemakal)
29° 42' 38.743" N 91° 39' 30.928" E
© 2006 Private



Jiama Village Unit 1 (Thungchak)
29° 41' 20.138" N 91° 40' 5.361" E
© 2013 DigitalGlobe. Source: Google Earth



Nomad Settlement Unit 15 (Cha Kyim Nang)
29° 41' 19.424" N 91° 37' 38.314" E
© 2013 DigitalGlobe. Source: Google Earth



New Jiama (Gyama) Valley Resettlement Village. A total of 144 planned housing compounds were identified from imagery recorded on 8 August 2012. Approximately 73% of building foundations were under construction at this time.
29° 46' 0.495" N 91° 40' 10.991" E
© 2013 DigitalGlobe. Source: e-geos

“The nomads of our area have a unique lifestyle and culture that allows them to live in the mountains in extreme conditions. This culture is unique, and has been transmitted for generations. This unique culture will be lost with the relocation.

Nomads are use to live free in the mountains They have never lived in this kind of sedentary environment. And this is not the only problem: most them spent their live herding yaks high in the mountains: they are illiterate and have no skills or work experience. Life in a permanent settlement is a completely different world.”

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH INTERVIEW WITH TSETEN GYELTSEN, A VILLAGER FROM GYAMA (JIAMA),
TIBET AUTONOMOUS REGION, JUNE 2012.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT SHOULD:

- **Impose a moratorium on relocation and rehousing until an independent, expert review of existing policies and practices is carried out to determine whether they comply with international law. The review should assess all government policies that require or lead to the displacement and resettlement of rural Tibetans, confiscation of their property, or imposed slaughter of their livestock.**
- **Where consultation and compensation have been inadequate, the government should give affected individuals and families the opportunity to return to their original land, to be resettled in an area nearby or like the one from which they were removed, and to receive appropriate compensation as required by Chinese law.**
- **Where those adversely affected by relocation and rehousing policies are unable to provide for themselves, authorities should take measures to ensure that adequate alternative means of livelihood are available, including return to herding.**
- **To comply with the recommendations of the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and other human rights treaty obligations, authorities should review the Property Rights Law 2007 to ensure it guarantees meaningful security of tenure to occupiers of houses and land.**
- **Recognize and uphold the rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and association to ensure that Tibetans and others are able to engage in peaceful activities and raise concerns and criticisms, including of government relocation and rehousing policies and practices.**

Human Rights Watch also urges members and participants in the 2013 Universal Periodic Review of China at the UN Human Rights Council to call on the government to impose a moratorium on all relocation and rehousing programs until they meet international standards.

Detailed recommendations are presented at the end of this report.



Between 2006 and 2012, over one-third of the entire Tibetan population of China has been rehoused or relocated under Chinese efforts at “Building a New Socialist Countryside” in Tibetan areas. In the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), two million rural Tibetans were rehoused through government-ordered renovation or construction of new houses, while in the eastern part of the Tibetan plateau hundreds of thousands of nomadic herders were relocated or settled in new permanent villages. Over a million more are scheduled to move to “New Socialist Villages” by the end of 2014.

While the Chinese government insists that all rehousing and relocations are entirely voluntary and respect “the will of the Tibetan farmers and herders,” the report documents extensive rights violations ranging from government failures to consult with affected communities in advance and failures to provide adequate compensation, both of which are required under international law for evictions to be legitimate. The report also addresses defects in the quality of the houses provided, the absence of means to challenge decisions or seek remedies for abuses, failures to restore livelihoods for those who are relocated, and disregard for autonomy rights in Tibetan areas nominally guaranteed by Chinese law.

Based on extensive testimonies collected over several years and analysis of official Chinese-language sources and satellite imagery, “*They Say We Should Be Grateful*” shows that Tibetans have virtually no say in policies that are radically altering their way of life. It calls on the Chinese government to impose a moratorium on all relocation and rehousing initiatives until an independent, expert review of existing policies and practices is carried out to determine their compliance with international law.

(above) A traditional Tibetan house in Toelung (Duilong) county, Tibet Autonomous Region. The Chinese character in red paint, chai (“tear down”), indicates that the house is slated for imminent demolition.

© 2007 Private

(front cover) A propaganda billboard featuring a “New Socialist Village” in Sershul (Shiqu) County, Sichuan Province. The billboard reads: “Build a Beautiful Homeland, Live a Happy Life”

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