

## **Tibet Information Network-Betraying The Truth**

Formerly within the Tibetan movement there was a significant number who paid homage to the work and reputation of the Tibet Information Network (TIN); an now defunct organisation, which researched and published material on matters relating to Tibet and China. Following its arrival on the scene in 1989, it established an often influential role, and became a valued source of information.

Certainly, it offered a detailed insight into the situation inside Tibet and brought-to-light many cases of political prisoners. Although steadfastly denying any role as a campaigning body, its work assisted others in the Tibetan scene, and improved the flow and quality of information. Credit for this achievement is often directed towards founder Robert Barnett and there is no doubting his efforts. But little is mentioned of the role played by Tibetans themselves. Not only the Tibetan Government-in-exile, which many believe were instrumental in helping to establish TIN, but those forgotten heroes inside Tibet who take a genuine and dangerous risk to obtain, verify and transmit information. Without their efforts a major element of TIN would have ceased to function, and it is such Tibetans who truly deserve credit. It was their patriotism and courage which furnished TIN with a wealth of information and thus helped earn its standing.

### **Denial and Deceit**

Having established a reputation for accuracy, and independent reportage TIN acquired an almost iconic status within the Tibetan movement. Beyond critique and examination to some, to speak-out against it risked being charged with a form of blasphemy. No organisation however operates without fault., some major, and there was one issue upon which TIN record was abysmal. This concerned human rights violations within Communist China's population programme.

From its inception, under the stewardship of Robert Barnett, and later Richard Oppenheimer, Kate Saunders and Thierry Dodin, maintained a careful policy of glossing-over, marginalising or ignoring the more odious aspects of the programme (see *Tibet: Defying the Dragon* March 1991 page 89). Under the guise of journalistic standards, and with a implacable cynicism reserved only it seems for this issue, it mirrored official Communist Chinese arguments by claiming that the one-child policy:

*"covers only 'nationalities' in China which has more than 10 million members ..So officially Tibetans are exempt from this policy"* (TIN correspondence to Optimus, 29th November 1993).

The same letter also suggested

*"..there are no first hand accounts of forcible (in the sense of physical force) abortions and sterilisations".*

The TIN correspondent went on to dismiss the testimony of Tibetan women as *"very*

*imprecise*" or *vague*". Others too joined the chorus of denial, deception and propaganda. Ms Kate Saunders, later to become an active member of TIN (presently the Communications Director at the International Campaign for Tibet) wrote in the October 1992 edition of Tibet News (newsletter of the Free Tibet Campaign-then TSGUK)

*"There are few first-hand accounts of forced abortions and sterilisations from Tibetan women" adding that "..it is not clear to what extent local authorities act on the directives from Beijing".*

This baseless assertion was in stark contrast to the findings of the late, and much missed Dr John S Aird former China specialist at the US Bureau of the Census and author of *'Slaughter of the Innocents'*, whose meticulous and expert researches, using official communist Chinese sources, calculated that between 1971 and 1985 ALONE there had been some 100 million coercive 'birth-control surgeries' including forced sterilisations and forced abortions. It is difficult to imagine how this staggering scale of operation could exist without the knowledge, involvement and ultimate sanction of Beijing, any more than the concentration camps could have existed without Hitler's knowledge.

Thanks to the efforts of Independent Tibet Network, Optimus and Dr John S Aird, there is no longer any doubt over the existence and brutal nature of the Communist Chinese programme and the trauma and violations it inflicts upon women (The British Medical Association, Amnesty International, US State Department and British Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs have now recognised and condemned human rights violations associated with the programme).

The dismissive and misleading arguments used Kate Saunders and TIN to deny coercion were reduced-to-ashes by the facts and detail documented in reports such as *'Slaughter of the Innocents'* by Dr John Aird (AEI Press 1991), *'Children of Despair'* by Martin Moss & Paul Ingram (Independent Tibet Network/Optimus 1992) and *'Orders of the State'* by Jeffrey Bowe & Martin Moss (Independent Tibet Network 2000).

### **Smokescreens and Censorship**

Yet there still remains a determined an orchestrated effort to suppress and distort open debate on this subject, and some suspect the cancerous tentacles of the British Foreign Office have been silently extended to prevent and limit exposure, of what is a highly sensitive issue, and one that could cause a considerable deterioration in relations between London and Beijing.

Could such influences have taken root within TIN's administration? There was considerable speculation surrounding its rapid elevation, questions were asked about its seemingly overnight transformation, from voluntary initiative into a functioning and seemingly funded organisation. The late Tsering Wangyal, former editor of the *Tibetan Review*, commented in 1990 that there *"was a lot of money sloshing around the Tibetan scene"*.

Notwithstanding such conjecture although the merciless scepticism it previously demonstrated at one stage appeared to have softened, its general coverage remained

characterised by tentative and extenuating terminology. This did not change under its last acting Director, Mr Thierry Dodin (now trying to resuscitate TIN as TibetInfoNet) who apparently with a Ladhakhi/Tibetan wife, one may have thought would prove more sympathetic to this issue than his predecessors. Not so.

The following featured in a TIN Bulletin February 2000:

*"Cadres in local areas are judged by their success in enforcing population targets, and it is the punishments and rewards associated with the limits they impose that are most likely to lead to excessive enforcement. According to reports received by TIN, a considerable element of coercion is applied to women, particularly in rural areas, through the mechanisms of fines and administrative structures introduced by these officials."*

Once again we have the old TIN mantra in deliberately vague and euphemistic form (worthy of communist China's State Family Planning Committee), the message though is clear. The responsibility for *"excessive enforcement"* lies with local officials, not with the central communist regime, and that these are defined as financial penalties and *"administrative structures"*.

The obscure terminology masks widely documented penalties of arbitrary arrest, detention, forced sterilisation and/or forced abortions.

Compare this with a quote from *'Defying the Dragon'* by Barnett:

*"In areas where a birth-control policy has been announced the principal method of enforcement appears to be a range of serious **administrative penalties**" (emphasis added).*

Such cynical resistance to acknowledge the brutal reality of the population programme was in stark contrast to the concerns of the Dalai Lama who, responding to questions from Paul Ingram and Jeff Bowe at UK Parliamentary meetings (1996 and 1993 respectively), described the situation as *"very serious"* and that matters were *"getting worse"*. During an audience with His Holiness, which I had the honour of attending, this subject was raised, and it was agreed that it demanded far greater exposure. Yet despite the often stated concerns of Tibet's Head of State about abuses resulting from the population programme, TIN's tradition of fudging this issue remained intact.

Indeed one wonders had this organisation operated during World-War-Two how they would have described eugenic and birth-control 'experiments' inflicted upon Gypsy and Jewish women. Presumably it would not have been Himmler who was responsible for the medical atrocities but over-zealous local Nazi officials!

## **Mum's the Word!**

A specious defence to such evasion and concealment was once offered by Kate Saunders, in which she claimed that careful reportage and phrasing was essential for maintaining credibility, and that a cautious approach was the hallmark of sensible journalism. During that conversation a couple of points came to mind.

The fact that Tibetan women are being forcibly sterilised was it seems too sensational for TIN, which explains the limited detailed references to such abuses in its literature. Secondly Saunder's excuse dismisses passionate, forceful and truthful journalism as being inherently flawed, and by implication unworthy of coverage by TIN, (and more lately her current employer, the International Campaign for Tibet, who are equally silent on this issue).

That such journalism is defective is of course not the case, as so eloquently demonstrated by Irish reporter Maggie O' Kane's award-winning coverage of the conflict in Bosnia and Kosovo. She and other writers have shown that compassion and emotion have a role in journalism, and need not detract from aspects of balance or fact. One only has to recall the coverage given to the mass rape of Muslim women in Bosnia. Had Kate Saunders, Robert Barnett, or Thierry Dodin been reporting this tragedy would the testimonies of rape have been dismissed with the callous suspicion they seem to reserve for the accounts of Tibetan women?

Reading TIN material on this issue, which in most cases seemed to originate from the offices of Xinhua (communist China's propaganda outlet), one inevitably compares the aspirations and motivation of Tibetans supplying information with this stunted coverage. They were engaged in an unwholesome betrayal of the facts, as the abuses inflicted upon Tibetans and Uighurs was diluted and marginalized into a form that cynically concealed the brutal nature of the population programme.

The following extract was taken from a TIN report (February 2000) and illustrates the point:

*"Enforcement measures include a combination of economic sanctions, in the form of 'extra birth fees' for those who transgress the limit and administrative penalties, such as the denial of birth certificates for any additional child born outside the quota".*

Now, according to this assertion, 'enforcement' appears limited to financial penalties or bureaucratic measures, of course this Beijing-style propaganda is in violent contradiction to penalties as experienced and widely documented by women in East Turkestan, Tibet and communist China. Such reports, containing a wealth of detailed information, were (and continue to be) readily available and have been featured by *Asia Watch, Independent Tibet Network, Optimus and Amnesty International*.

*"Despite laws prohibiting such practices, many women continued to be subjected to forced abortions and sterilizations by local authorities attempting to comply with strict family planning policies". (Amnesty International USA Report 2006)*

Accounts have appeared in the written and broadcast media too which, unlike Kate Saunders, Robert Barnett, Richard Oppenheimer and Thierry Dodin, have not been afraid to report freely and forcefully on medical atrocities and violations resulting from this programme.

One only has to recall the BBC Television documentary *'Women of the Yellow Earth'* (24th July 1994) which featured a young Chinese named Bai, whose family and home were threatened by family-planning official for weeks before she 'agreed' to attend a local clinic, where she was tied onto a medical slab and sterilised. In pain and crying for anaesthetic she was told to "put up with it", by the surgeon, traumatised and in obvious agony, she was left in a grimy dormitory, before being left to make her way back across the mountain to her village.

These disturbing images were eclipsed by the acclaimed documentaries *'The Dying Rooms'* and *'Return to the Dying Rooms'* (British Channel 4 television 1995) both of which recorded the inhuman treatment of orphaned baby girls, left to die in state controlled orphanages, as a result of the one-child-policy and the traditional preference for boys. The misery and suffering recorded in all these films resulted in public outrage across Europe and the US, and intense public debate in the British media.

The intensely harrowing scenes exposed the coercive nature of communist China's population policies, and supports the evidence, that continues to emerge, which documents a series of draconian measures inflicted upon women including financial penalties, arbitrary arrest, detention, emotional, social and physical coercion, and forced sterilisations and forced abortions.

The duplicitous claim that Tibetans are exempt from the harrowing realities of coercive birth-control is forcefully contradicted by the disturbing contents of the UK television documentary *'Undercover Tibet'* (Channel Four 2008) , in which producer Jezza Neumann documented such abuses as being all too real for Tibetans.

*"China maintains that it doesn't implement its one-child policy in minority regions such as Tibet, but we discovered that this wasn't true. One woman told us how she'd been subjected to a forced sterilisation. The secret police broke into her house and said they would take all of her belongings if she didn't go with them. Aspirin was the only anaesthetic she was given before they cut her open."* (The Independent 31st March 2008)

Yet Kate Saunders, Robert Barnett and Thierry Dodin maintained a callous policy of denial concerning this issue. As evidenced by the February 2000 below TIN was comfortable to unquestioningly repeat communist propaganda. Suggesting that far from being abused and coerced, Tibetan women simply 'volunteer' for sterilisation as a result of rewards offered!

*"The 1992 TAR birth control regulations stipulate that women who "adopt corrective measures", or undergo sterilisation and women who have "induced births in the mid-term of their pregnancy" (officially sanctioned abortions) are to be given a set time off work determined by which of the operations they have. The women who have the*

*operation are rewarded with a supply of "10 jin [5kg]" of flour (glutinous rice) and two jin [1kg] of edible (butter) oil", according to the regulations."*

As a premier source of information, TIN had access to the same testimony and evidence as other organisations with an interest in Tibet, so why was it possessed with such a psychotic reticence in featuring detailed testimonies, which describe the actual nature of coercion and associated human rights violations?

It could not claim, with any credibility, that to do so would have jeopardised its journalistic credentials, as far more respected established media outlets such as the *Washington Post*, *Boston Globe*, *The Observer*, *The Independent*, *Daily Telegraph* and *Daily Mail* all exposed and described the more odious aspects of the programme. Furthermore, in the interests of balance and impartiality, qualities which were used often by Kate Saunders as a defence, one imagines TIN would have wished to give equally detailed and prominent coverage to eyewitness/personal testimony.

Yet, apart from some isolated interviews recorded in 1990, it is hard from their documentation to locate comprehensive references to the atrocities caused by the population policies. With what reports do feature one is always left with the impression of reading an amended script, perhaps remodelled beyond the requirements of standard editing? Over the years Independent Tibet Network has met and interviewed Tibetan women who have witnessed and experienced the horrors of 'birth-control' surgery, and noted the amount of detail, consistency and facts in their accounts.

There are no valid reasons to doubt their sincerity and honesty, nor dismiss the obvious trauma which has blighted their lives. Some committed suicide. TIN also questioned such women, therefore it is difficult to grasp *why* their experiences were reported in such a truncated and adulterated form.

### **Excusing the Dragon**

It is difficult not to conclude that TIN was actively watering-down such accounts, by expunging and diluting any reference to forced sterilisations and forced abortions. Perhaps, as speculated earlier, this may be evidence of the perfidious influence of the British Foreign Office? Whatever the reason, their consistent evasion, and distortion on this major human rights subject, hardly befitted a group dedicated to providing "accurate and objective" information.

Having "*sought the truth in the groves of academe*" it seemed that TIN resorted to the ultimate form of censorship, by deleting any detailed reference to violations resulting from the population programme.

A further spurious excuse, once used to justify the manner in which TIN reported this issue, was that it was not a campaigning body, and therefore required to adopt a 'neutral' position. This reasonable argument was somewhat undermined by the fact that it's reportage on the subject was saturated with official communist Chinese propaganda. Which, by its very nature, offers a grossly single-sided and duplicitous

perspective.

The following exemplifies how TIN's heavy reliance upon communist Chinese sources exposed Kate Saunders et al to the charge of being unwitting partners in a deliberate attempt to deceive a foreign audience, concerning the coercive nature of China's population programme.

*"Although the Chinese authorities generally deny the use of coercion in imposing birth-control restrictions, a rare admission was made by a Chinese official... Cong Jun said in a speech.. on 29th October 1998 that the State Family Planning Committee had issued circulars throughout the country to prohibit its branch organisations from forcing women to undergo abortions or sterilisations...."* (TIN Report February 2000)

At first glance this appears a routine account of events, but wait a moment what about these 'circulars'? When and why were they issued? *New York Times* writer, Elizabeth Rosenthal was, it seems, deceived by this Chinese official and invested considerable importance in her article (1st November 1998) to the supposed assurances given by State Family Planning Committee spokeswoman, Cong Jun. In fact the regulations prohibiting coercion, mentioned by Rosenthal and TIN, had not been published, in the then recent Chinese media, and no reference to them appeared in provincial level family planning documents, which usually reflect any amendments to national policies on population policies.

Close examination of the *Xinhua* dispatches, quoted by Rosenthal, TIN and others, revealed they had either been inadvertently or deliberately misled. The statements by Cong were carried by TWO *Xinhua* releases (dated 29th October 1998), one of these (presumably the version used by TIN, and other foreign writers) was an English language version released in Beijing.

Which quoted Cong as follows:

*"The State Family Planning Committee has issued circulars throughout the country to prohibit its branch organizations at all levels from forcing women to undergo abortions or sterilization.."*

This statement created an impression that the "circulars" were recently issued. However, **the other Xinhua dispatch, published in Chinese from Hong Kong, made it clear that this was not so** and quoted Cong Jun as stating:

*"The Chinese Government **long ago issued** circulars throughout the country specifically prohibiting family planning departments at all levels from forcing women to undergo induced abortions or sterilization."* (emphasis added).

The key phrase "long ago," expunged from the English version, indicated that the reference was probably either to the Party Central Committee "open letter" of September 25, 1980 or to the unpublished Party Central Committee Document No. 7 of April 12, 1984, or perhaps both. The open correspondence of 1980 cautioned against coercion and was issued following an adverse reaction against the grim realities of the initial year of the one-child policy in 1979, while Document No. 7 was

seemingly released in response to a popular backlash which resulted from the extensive birth-control surgeries carried in 1983, but were superseded and effectively reversed by ensuing policy documents which took a far more draconian line.

Cong Jun's original address was made to a Sino-European seminar on women's issues, and therefore was aimed mainly at a foreign audience. It was not quoted in the Chinese domestic media outside of Hong Kong. Her speech may have been a deliberate response to the damaging testimony on coercion in family planning, which was being reported at that time in Fujian Province (presented by Ms. Gao Xiaoduan, before the U. S. Congressional committee on June 10, 1998).

### **Betraying the Truth**

Clearly communist China manipulates its foreign audience to believe that they prohibit coercive measures, but they assiduously make such claims only in channels not likely to be noted by family planning officials in China. Whose coercive excesses they obviously do not wish to discourage. It appears that in publishing this misleading statement, Kate Saunders and TIN were guilty of assisting *Xinhua* in that end. This issue raised serious questions about its uncritical acceptance of official communist sources, and seriously undermined its claim to "*provide an accurate, impartial and comprehensive news and information service*".

As supposed experts in their field, surely Richard Oppenheimer, Robert Barnett, Kate Saunders and Thierry Dodin would have been aware that if the communist authorities were serious about placing a check upon coercion, they would have issued recurrent orders against it in their annual national report sessions of family planning. Moreover they would see to it that warnings against coercion, and penalties for local officials, guilty of using coercion, would have been incorporated into the then latest versions of the provincial family planning regulations

According to the late Dr John S Aird, not one of these regulations contained a word about coercion. The obvious explanation is that coercion is a necessary and intended aspect of program implementation in communist China.

Meanwhile, central family planning policy documents continue to call for the use of "administrative measures," the Chinese euphemism for the use of local administrative powers, to enforce compliance. For years the central authorities have hinted broadly, that coercive measures were needed, and even in some of the most recent central statements about family planning, it is acknowledged that the program is not voluntary and that any easing of pressures would result in a rebound in the birth rate.

Such information is available to any serious researcher, as it was at that time presumably for TIN, so why feature an account which sought to create the impression that the communist regime's family planning committee were taking positive action to curb coercion? Seen in isolation this could have been attributed to administrative oversight and sloppy research. However taken in context with the general softly-softly tone TIN employed, when reporting on issues linked to communist China's population programme, one is forced to reach a darker conclusion.

## **Double Standards**

The degree to which this issue was obscured is brought into sharp relief by comparing TIN's previous reportage of political prisoners. The smoke-screen of balance and journalistic caution, which stifled a full exposé of the abuses resulting from communist China's population policies, no longer applied. Subscribers were offered harrowing details of systematic torture. The following account from a Tibetan nun is taken from its former website:

*"They beat us so savagely that there was blood everywhere, on the walls and on the floor. It looked like an abattoir. They beat us with their belts, until their belts broke ... then they used electric batons ... Some of us had torn ears, others had wounds in their heads. There was so much blood."*

The criticism here is not directed at the quality, tone, or use of such testimony, which greatly served those engaged in human rights and Tibet, but towards what appear conditional standards applied by TIN. Unlike such reports from political prisoners personal and eyewitness accounts of forced sterilisation, or other related abuse, given by Tibetan women, always appeared to require textual revision, removing any unpleasant realities, and cloaking the odious nature of the population programme in euphemism and extenuating terminology.

## **TIN (Tibetan Infants Nil)**

Was this respected organisation engaged in a deliberate and consistent campaign to camouflage the actual nature and extent of coercion within the communist Chinese population programme? Does the spectre of Foreign Office influence hold true?

Certainly there have been many instances which indicate that something was going on; the *International Consultation on Tibet* (1990), *International Lawyers Conference* (1993) *UK Foreign Affairs Committee* (1993) and *International Development Committee* (1999) either ignored or gave virtually no coverage of this issue in their published reports. More recently the 2007 Foreign and Commonwealth Human Rights Report has just one minimalist and tentative paragraph on this issue. Progress it seems is slow.

Though now no longer operating (although Thierry Dodin has tried to raise from its ashes a similar operation) the questions remains as to why TIN operated a similar policy of avoidance and concealment. If, as it claimed at the time, it was wholly independent why adopt a similar position on this issue and employ syntax of such striking similarity?

Others too expressed their dismay at the censorship surrounding this subject, Ms Carol Devine, author of *Tibetan Women and the Struggle for an Independent Tibet* noted:

*"In my lobbying for Tibet's freedom and Tibetan women's rights, I have found so many people unwilling to say that issues of forced abortion and sterilization should be at the top of the list when speaking of human rights abuses in Tibet"*

(correspondence 5th October 1993 to Independent Tibet Network)

Devine's book could have proved a valuable asset to an understanding of conditions facing Tibetan women however it was seriously undermined by a deficient chapter entitled *'The Quality Baby'*.

In researching this chapter she had, significantly as it turned out, sought the advice of Robert Barnett (then director of TIN) who it seems had assured her that "credibility and professionalism" were the hallmarks of his organisation. The result however was a confusing, misleading and flawed analysis which contained a textual error on page 68 that:

*"..the evidence does NOT support the very serious claims of coercive abortions and sterilisations.."*

Ms.Devine later admitted that this should have read:

*"..the evidence DOES support the very serious claims of forced abortions and sterilisations.."*

In a letter (5th October 1993) to Optimus and Independent Tibet Network Devine wrote:

*"I sincerely wish I had been more outspoken, and convincing in this chapter"*.

Quite so, but one wonders if this was ever possible, once she had engaged with an organisation that had consistently glossed-over the haunting testimony of women traumatised by 'birth-control surgery'. This section of her book certainly generated much confusion, and I know of many independent researchers who could make no sense of it. Whatever the truth, TIN remained during its operation an authoritative source of information to the Tibetan movement, and exerted much influence upon how various issues were reported (**its offspring, including Robert Barnett and Kate Saunders have since become barefoot-experts on Tibet and regularly misinform the media on the situation inside Tibet and the nature of the political struggle there**).

It was therefore not surprising to note that organisations such as the *Australia Tibet Council, Free Tibet Campaign* (where Ms.Saunders began her efforts to carve a career from the corpse of Tibet), and others exhibited (and still do so) a similar tendency to obscure the facts. Such diffusion, along with a general inactivity on this issue, has no doubt cost lives and resulted in other groups and individuals taking no action.

One only has to recall the international gatherings of Tibet supporters, during which every aspect of the Tibetan issue was recounted in detail, APART from the subject of coercive birth control, which has been consistently ignored.

A French friend who has been consistently active in her support Tibet over the years has met a similar apathy towards this issue. During 2007 she sought to obtain information on the subject from a number of French-based Tibet support groups and

women's organisations, the overwhelming majority of whom either did not respond or claimed ignorance. In diluting and overlooking the true nature and extent of medical atrocities resulting from the population programme TIN, and its staff of Robert Barnett, Kate Saunders, Robert Oppenheimer, and Thierry Dodin were (and remain) guilty of complicity. They were supposed to be helping the very Tibetan women whose lives have been blighted and wrecked by the communist China. How much human misery would have been avoided if these individuals had rectified their biased and blinkered coverage?

### **Coercion: the Reality**

During February 2009 a Yunnan (some parts of which is formed by annexed Tibetan territory) newspaper documented another instance of forced sterilisation. It concerned a woman, named as Ms.Zhang Kecui, who was kidnapped in the street by family planning officials and forcibly taken to a clinic where she was tied onto a medical table and sterilized. She was reported as having two children, which according to China's draconian population regulations meant Ms.Zhang should have undergone 'birth-control surgery' (forced sterilisation) after the second birth.

Another account, which appeared on a number of websites during September 2008, reported a case of infanticide in Wuhan, central China. A farmer, named as Huang Qiusheng, said his wife, who was nine months pregnant, gave birth to a live child, despite being forced to submit to an injection to induce an abortion. The infant was thrown into a toilet.The following day an elderly woman, named Liu Zhuyu, heard the infant crying, so rescued it and delivered the baby to a nearby child clinic. The reports document that family planning officials then challenged Liu, grabbed the infant and killed it by dashing the child to the ground.

(Source:The Sunday Times-15/02/2009)

In September 2007, according to a Radio Free China report, a couple sought legal action against the Communist Chinese authorities following a forced abortion. Yang Zhongchen and his wife Jin Yani, under the provisions of the one-child policy, were required to obtain a license to have a first child. Conceiving a child before marriage is an offence. They were forced to wait until Jin was the minimum age of 20 before being married. This meant that their first child, a girl, was according to dictates of the population policy, 'illegal'.

Attempts to bribe local "family planning" officials failed and while Yang was out of town, Jin was abducted on September 7 by local officials a few weeks before her due date.

Jin described the incident in which she was taken to a local clinic and her clothes stripped from her. Doctors then pulled the dead baby from her body with forceps. While forced abortion is technically illegal in China, it is known that officials, faced with quotas, frequently succumb to what is usually described as "over-zealousness" in enforcing the official one-child policy.

A report by the *China Information Center*, released in May 2005 documented mass arrests of women for forced 'birth-control surgery' in Chewang Township,

Cangshan County, Shandong Province.

*“Hundreds of women were hunted down, dragged from their homes and forced to endure abortions. Even women who had been pregnant for eight months were not spared, according to official statistics, more than 160 women who were eight months pregnant were forcibly aborted and/or sterilised“.*

In August 2002 a former Tibetan Doctor, with direct experience of communist China's coercive birth-control policies issued a press statement, in response to a fact-free and distorted article by the Guardian's (UK Newspaper) John Gittings. It was a damning exposé of the medical atrocities which are inflicted upon Tibetan women

*“After taking women age group of 18 to 35 in villages and district level, forced birth-control operations were carried out. The number of birth-control surgery to be done in a place per year is fixed and we have to carry out these 'surgeries' to fulfil the given duties. In many places a forced 'lottery system' is applied to complete the number of women to be operated upon against the will of respective women”.*

Ms Gao Xiaoduan was a former Family Planning Officer in Communist China, in a moving and revealing testimony presented in the United States 2002 she stated

*“Many of them were crippled for life, while others were victims of mental disorders resulting from their abortions. Families were ruined or destroyed. I myself did so many brutal things, yet at the time, I thought I was implementing the policy of the Communist party, and that I was an exemplary citizen, a good cadre. Once I watched a woman nine months pregnant undergo an abortion. She had no other children, but had not yet received her certificate allowing her to give birth. According to policy, this too warrants an abortion”.*

According to another report featured in The Times 24th August 2000, in Hubei Province , a pregnant woman identified as Mrs Liu was forcibly given a saline injection by her local family planning officials in an attempt to bring on an abortion and kill the child But, surprisingly, it was born alive and healthy. The officials then ordered the father to take the baby out of the hospital and kill it, but though he was afraid of punishment, he merely left the baby behind an office building, where a doctor found it, and returned it to its mother. The infant was given its inoculations and discharged. When the couple got home with their new baby, they found five family planning officials waiting for them in their living room.

A struggle arose in which the officials wrested the child from its parents, took it out into a paddy field, and drowned it in sight of the parents, and their neighbours. The action so enraged people in the community that they brought the story to the attention of provincial newspapers, and from there it got into the foreign press as well, embarrassing the central government.

On 12th February 2001 Amnesty International issued a report entitled "Torture: A growing scourge in China--Time for Action" declaring that torture is increasing in China. Among many examples cited, was a 1998 incident, in which a peasant from a

village in Changsha, Hunan Province, whose wife was suspected of having fled because she was pregnant, was tortured twice. On the second occasion he was:

*"denied food, hung upside down, whipped and beaten with wooden clubs and burned with cigarette butts. He reportedly became doubly incontinent, his body covered in excrement. The officials reportedly then branded his lower body with soldering irons, tied wire around his genitals and ripped off his penis."*

Harrowing accounts of this sort are doubtless the most staggering examples of coercion, which reach international attention, because they generate such local outrage that they find their way into Chinese regional newspapers, and thus into the foreign press. Other atrocities lay hidden, until the victim escapes.

Independent Tibet Network had an interview with a 37 year-old woman from Kham in East Tibet, following her flight into exile to India. She was another victim of the population programme:

*"I was taken by force by the Chinese and sterilised, having gone beyond the stated limit of children. Nearly 30 women were also sterilised at the same time as me, in my village 70% of women at 18 have been sterilised. They treat us like animals and use many crude methods, my husband's sister was sterilised before his very eyes. She was four months pregnant and had been taken to the centre by force. They tied her hands and legs while the doctor, wearing gloves, put his hand into the vagina and squeezed the foetus. She was delirious and bled profusely for sometime".*

#### **Alternative forms of 'surgery' used more brutal methods:**

*"While operating they cut the stomach vertically and horizontally often without anaesthetic and with little consideration for the pain that is being inflicted. I have witnessed these terrible things with my own eyes".*

According to the testimony, birth-control officers would visit the villages once a month and take down names of all those who were to be sterilised, any that showed resistance were taken by force. The staff carrying out such 'surgery' were, it was claimed, often unqualified and showed little concern for the well-being of the women. The witness reported highly detailed instances of women, almost nine months pregnant, being:

*"given medicine to induce labour and afterwards the premature infant is put into a bucket of hot water".*

Such accounts have surfaced time and again from East Turkestan, Tibet, Inner Mongolia, and China itself. More routine cases of coercion probably do not get reported in the media, especially with the Chinese authorities doing what they can to suppress such reports.

As with the former Tibet Information Network groups such as the International Campaign for Tibet, Free Tibet Campaign and Australia Tibet Council and Tibet Information seem willing partners in the effort to conceal the truth. In light of the censorship surrounding this issue the words of TIN's previous director, Richard

Oppenheimer appear somewhat tainted:

*"The world needs to know what is happening in Tibet today. Tibet Information Network (TIN) is dedicated to giving the world the facts - accurately and objectively... ". (emphasis added)*

### **Dark Horizon**

At a national meeting convened by the Party Central Committee in March 1999, Jiang Zemin said:

*"Family Planning and population control constitute arduous work involving many aspects. Instead of putting a brake on the work, we must strengthen it. We should further improve our population macro-control, family planning management... Education, legal, economic, and administrative measures should be adopted."*

That position has not in any concrete manner altered, and one should not be deceived by the practical definition of the euphemism "administrative measures," . That means continuing mandatory IUD insertions, sterilisations, and abortions, and suggests that, for the foreseeable future, at least, communist China's population programme will remain as coercive as it has been since its inception.

According to the late Dr John S Aird the abuses look set to continue:

*"In sum, the evidence throughout the 1990s and up to the present moment is that the central authorities are determined to tighten their control over family planning work to maintain China's current low birth rate. They have made it clear that these efforts shall continue. Coercive measures are to be refined and "perfected" but not relaxed. In fact, they seem to be assuming more extreme forms". (Private communication with the author-2000)*

This statement has proved to be tragically correct, as evidenced by the 2004 testimony of Mao Hengfeng, who, as a result of her campaigns against coercive birth-control in Communist China, was imprisoned in a psychiatric 'hospital' and suffered systematic torture, all because she refused to have a forced abortion!

As reflected in Amnesty International's China Report, the prospects for women in occupied Tibet, East Turkestan and China itself look bleak as they continue to be at the knife-edge of family planning policies that inflict the most appalling violations. In a detailed document Amnesty limited its concern to the following comment:

*"Serious violations against women and girls continued to be reported as a result of the enforcement of the family planning policy, including forced abortions and sterilizations." (AI Report on China-2005)*

Some of these women have endured the darkest trauma, yet had the courage to report their suffering to organisations such as the former Tibet Information Network, presumably in the hope that the brutal reality of communist China's population programme would be brought to a wider audience.

Little did they realise that not only would their testimony be subjected to merciless scepticism and censorship but that their trust and hope could be betrayed by an organisation supposedly dedicated to reporting truthfully on conditions inside their country.

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Reading List:

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