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Washington, D.C. - The self-immolations of Tibetan monks and nuns are the direct result of China's harsh suppression of Tibetan culture and religion, said the US Commission on International Religious Freedom yesterday. The U.S. bipartisan federal agency urged the Obama administration to further challenge China to review counterproductive policies toward Tibetan Buddhism and to embrace concrete negotiations with appointed representatives of the Dalai Lama. The Administration previously had raised Tibetan issues with China at last week's Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting in Hawaii.

"China's infamous campaigns to restrict Tibetan religion and culture are squarely to blame for the despair that drives these horrifying acts of self-immolation," said [Leonard Leo](#), USCIRF Chair. "The Administration should lead a global effort to stop future deaths and encourage negotiations between Beijing and the Dalai Lama's representatives. The religious freedom of all Tibetans must be protected."

Since March, 2009, eleven Tibetan monks or former monks and three Tibetan nuns have set themselves on fire. Six are believed to have died. Most of the self-immolations occurred at the Kirti Monastery in Sichuan Province and were in response to China's escalating attempts to stifle Tibetan's peaceful political expression and public religious veneration of the Dalai Lama. Many Tibetans also oppose China's compulsory "patriotic education" programs for Tibetan monks and nuns and new laws expanding Chinese control over the selection of Buddhist

religious leaders.

“We commend Secretary Clinton’s public statements on Tibet at last week’s APEC summit,” said Leo. “We urge the Administration to develop a coordinated strategy and message at this week’s East Asia summit with nations such as Japan, South Korea, India, and Thailand that have significant Buddhist populations.”

USCIRF’s 2011 Annual Report to Congress states that “religious freedom conditions for Tibetan Buddhists...remain particularly acute as the government broadened its efforts to discredit and imprison religious leaders, control the selection of clergy, [and] ban peaceful religious gatherings... The Chinese government’s [policies have] led to significant religious freedom abuses and nurtured deep resentments among Tibetans.”

Further information and policy recommendations can be found at [www.uscifr.gov](http://www.uscifr.gov) .