

Testimony of Temulun Togochoog

Before the U.S. Congressional Executive Commission on China (CECC)

December 5, 2024

Sainbainuu and greetings, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Temulun Togochoog. I am 17 years old and a U.S.-born Southern Mongolian human rights activist, working alongside my father, Enghebatu Togochoog, Director of the Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center. My parents live in exile here in the United States, and as a result, I have never been able to visit my homeland.

I have never met my aunts, uncles, cousins, or nieces and nephews. I have never celebrated *Tsagaan Sar*, the Traditional Mongolian New Year, with my relatives or learned many of their customs firsthand. My parents have not returned to Southern Mongolia to attend family weddings or funerals, nor to say their final goodbyes to loved ones.

Despite these challenges, my parents have worked tirelessly to preserve our language, culture, and traditions. When I was little, they sought out Mongolian babysitters to help teach me and my sister our mother tongue. This was no easy task, as there were few Mongolians in New York. Still, I was fortunate to learn some Mongolian from the babysitters they found.

As I started school, time at home—and opportunities to learn Mongolian—diminished, even though my parents consistently spoke Mongolian at home. Southern Mongolians use the traditional script written vertically from top to bottom, a script with over 800 years of history. This script was not easy to learn, so my parents arranged for a teacher from independent Mongolia to teach me and my sister the Cyrillic Mongolian script.

In the summer of 2018, my father took us to a children’s camp at the Mongol-Tibetan Buddhist Center in Bloomington, Indiana. It was a rare chance to speak Mongolian, sing traditional songs, cook Mongolian food, and play with other Mongolian children, mostly from independent Mongolia. It was a pleasant experience that gave me a glimpse of what it might be like to return to Southern Mongolia. However, one painful memory stands out: some Northern Mongolian children ridiculed our Southern Mongolian accents and called us “Chinese.”

Despite these struggles, I feel privileged to have grown up in the United States, a free and democratic country where I can learn my language, practice my traditions, and express my opinions without fear. This stands in stark contrast to the millions of Southern Mongolians who face repression and denial of basic rights.

Over the past seven decades, China has encouraged large-scale Chinese migration into Southern Mongolia, reducing the ethnic Mongolian population to only 18% of the region. This has not only displaced us from our land but has also eroded our culture and way of life.

In the early 2000s, China introduced policies to forcibly resettle Mongolian herders, effectively ending nomadic pastoralism under the pretext of “grassland protection.” By 2015, all nomads within China’s borders had been relocated, marking the end of this centuries-old way of life.

Advocates for Mongolian rights face severe consequences. Prominent activist Hada was detained in 1995 and sentenced to 15 years in prison. Despite completing his sentence, he was held for an additional four years and has been under house arrest since. His wife has been arrested multiple times, and his son was imprisoned at just 17 years old. The family remains under constant surveillance.

Other activists have faced similar repression. In 2020, Yanjindulam was sentenced to three years in prison for defending herders’ rights and advocating for the Mongolian language. Dissident historian Lhamjab Borjigin disappeared last year after being deported from independent Mongolia.

Since 2020, the Chinese government has effectively removed the Mongolian language from the education system, replacing it with Chinese as the sole language of instruction. Mongolian-language books and publications have been banned, and Mongolian signs and symbols are being removed from public spaces. Authorities promote “patriotic education” to enforce loyalty to the Chinese nation and Communist Party.

In September 2020, many Mongolians, particularly students, protested these policies through school boycotts and strikes. Approximately 300,000 Southern Mongolian students joined the movement. The Chinese government responded harshly, detaining and placing under house arrest an estimated 8,000–10,000 people.

The Chinese government’s systematic oppression and erasure of Mongolian language, culture, and identity is fueling a surge in violence and hatred from the Chinese population toward local Mongolians in Southern Mongolia. In a recent heartbreaking case, nine-year-old Mongolian girl Hairaa was brutally beaten by her Chinese teacher for struggling with Chinese-language homework. During the assault, her ear was torn open and began bleeding profusely, requiring emergency treatment at a hospital. This shocking incident is not an isolated case but part of a disturbing and larger pattern of abuse faced by Mongolians in Southern Mongolia.

Given these deteriorating conditions, I respectfully urge the Committee and the U.S. Congress to consider the following recommendations:

1. Nominate Hada for the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of his lifelong struggle for Southern Mongolian rights and his decades of imprisonment and house arrest.
2. Urge the U.S. Agency for Global Media to act on the Congress’s recommendation to establish a Mongolian-language service in Voice of America.
3. Support the swift passage of the “Southern Mongolian Human Rights Policy Act” introduced by Senators Merkley and Sullivan.
4. Assist Southern Mongolian communities, both in Southern Mongolia and in exile, in preserving their language, culture, and identity.

Thank you for your time and attention.