

Submitted by TTC Chair J. Colle  
on behalf of Councillor G. Perks

December 14, 2016

**Re: Request for Removal of TTC Advertisement**

To: TTC Commissioners and Members of TTC Advertising Review Working Group (ARWG).

TTC vehicles currently display an advertisement, picture attached, 'Old Culture New Tibet', that is offensive to many in our city.

I have attached two letters from members of the Tibetan community who share their personal and community's response to this advertisement.

I support the request of Students for a Free Tibet Canada and the larger Tibetan community for the removal of advertisement 'Old Culture New Tibet' currently on display in TTC vehicles.

I am requesting that TTC Commissioners and TTC Advertising Review Working Group immediately review this request and remove these offensive advertisements from TTC property.

I appreciate your swift response to this request.

Sincerely,



Councillor Gord Perks  
Parkdale/High Park- Ward 14



**STUDENTS FOR A FREE TIBET CANADA**

@ 1313 Queen St. West  
Toronto, ON M6K 1L8  
647.709.1545  
sonam@studentsforafreetibet.org  
www.sftcanada.org

December 6, 2016

Andy Byford  
Chief Executive Officer  
Toronto Transit Commission  
1900 Yonge Street, Toronto, ON M4S1Z2

Dear Andy Byford,

My name is Sonam Chokey, and I am the National Director at Students for a Free Tibet Canada, a nonprofit grassroots organization that works in solidarity with Tibetans in Tibet in their struggle for freedom and independence.

I am writing to you today to tell you about a very offensive ad that has been brought to my attention by many of my friends and colleagues who ride the TTC. The ad in question is a propaganda ad sponsored by the Chinese government through the China National Tourist Office that reads "Old Culture" and "New Tibet." In it, there are two pictures - a black-and-white photo of tents in an old landscape, followed by a "modern" picture of multi-storey buildings. This racist ad violates the Ontario Human Rights Code because it paints Tibetans as backwards and underdeveloped, and disregards the military invasion that resulted in decades of violent crackdowns and oppression of my people. All of this is extremely offensive to Tibetans such as myself, as I am a former refugee whose father had to flee Tibet during China's invasion.

This ad, with its problematic messages, offend my people on their daily commute, and remind them of China's ability to buy their way into spaces that are supposed to be free of such hurtful messaging. The TTC must pull these ads and keep these spaces free of racism and propaganda.

On behalf of the thousands of displaced and exiled Tibetans who now call Toronto home, we ask you to take down these offensive propaganda ads immediately and make a public apology acknowledging that propaganda ads are not acceptable in a country that values free expression and human rights.

Toronto is my home and has been one of the most vibrant and accepting cities I have lived in. I hope you will keep the city of Toronto safe and inclusive.

Sincerely,

Sonam Chokey  
National Director  
Students for a Free Tibet Canada

## **Personal message from Tsering, who was born and raised in Tibet, and currently studies in York University**

I was tired after studying many hours for final exams and pleased to be going home. I took the express bus from York University to Downsview station and considered taking a nap during my 40minutes commute home on the subway. Then when I got on the train, I saw this ad hanging beside me. First I didn't pay attention but the word "Tibet" intrigued me and I looked closer. Instantly my whole body became covered by goose bumps. There were so many thoughts racing through my head. For someone who doesn't know the real situation in Tibet, they might think look at this ad and think "Wow", Tibet has been totally developed under the Chinese communist Government.

For me, looking at it is unbearable. It triggered memories back to when I was in Chinese school in Tibet. There were so many pictures just like that ad in my textbook, which was specially printed for us Tibetan students. We were forced to look at these pictures and memorize poems about how the Communist government has changed Tibet into a better place. We had to look at such pictures everyday and recite the poems as part of our morning prayer. If we do refused, there were punishments. One was being forced to stand on the ice in bare feet.

I always wondered why only Tibetan children had to recite these poems praising the Communist government and not Chinese students. My life in Tibet occupied by China was similar to the life here of aboriginal children in residential school. I didn't want to join the Chinese school but I had no choice. If I don't go then my parents had to pay a huge fine. Chinese school was like residential school; we were not allowed to say Buddhist prayers, not allowed to make friend with fellow Tibetans and we were shamed for speaking Tibetan. The motto of our school was "We love China, we speak Chinese".

When I was looking at this ad on the Toronto TTC, all those thoughts haunted me again. Since the old Tibet and the new Chinese Tibet, millions of Tibetans have lost their lives. Because of the Chinese invasion, thousands of Tibetans have had to flee to different countrys around the world and become refugees. Being a refugee is hard. I left my home 11 years ago when I was 14, and since then I have not seen the faces of my parents.

This ad hanging beside me brought all those memories and I felt really discriminated against for my ethnic origin. The TTC should understand how discriminatory this ad is to every Tibetan who sees this. What if you joined two picture of Toronto at the time of native people and time after white people came and said "Old culture and New Toronto"? How would you feel about it? This is obviously Chinese propaganda showing Tibet is the great place to visit even though it is the most restricted and heavily oppressed territory in the world. It is really sad to see this kind of picture again in my life even in a country known to champion Human Rights. On the behalf of all Tibetans and all people who are discriminated based on their ethnic origin, I am humbly request you remove this ad immediately.