

A Spanish court has agreed to hear a lawsuit alleging that China's former president, Hu Jintao, committed genocide in Tibet.

The suit, filed by the Tibet Support Committee in Madrid, alleges that Hu was responsible for repressive programs when he was the top Chinese official in Tibet from 1988 to 1992. It also says as China's president from 2003 to 2013, he was responsible for additional crimes against Tibetans.

In a ruling released Thursday, an appeals court said the Spanish legal system allows the suit to be heard because at least one alleged victim of genocide is a Spanish citizen.

The plaintiff in the case is a Buddhist monk, Thubten Wangchen, who spoke Friday with VOA's Tibetan Service. He calls the ruling a good decision.

"I think this will make the Chinese leaders to be more careful in the future and give a message that they can't bury the truth about it," he said.

China has criticized the court decision, saying Tibet's affairs are a domestic concern. The Foreign Ministry said it rejects interference by other countries in its internal matters.

Alan Cantos, with the Tibet Support Committee, said members of the group are "ecstatic" over the ruling.

"They are saying this case is well founded, the court is competent, the national connection is there, so there should be no attempts to derail it, you know, for other reasons or with bad arguments," said Cantos. "And they completely agreed with just about everything we had been saying against Hu Jintao."

Cantos said there had been fears the court would be swayed by diplomatic or economic concerns, but those proved unfounded.

Many Tibetans say the Chinese government harshly suppresses their traditions and religious practices. They say Beijing also has allowed tens of thousands of ethnic Han Chinese to move into the autonomous region, and they are exploiting its resources and economically dominating ethnic Tibetans.

China says since it took control of Tibet in the 1950s, it has raised living standards. Beijing authorities consider the region's spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, to be a separatist trying to create an independent Tibet. The Dalai Lama, who lives in exile in India, denies this.