

FREE TIBET

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50 years of resistance

freeTIBET 

• UK says Tibet part of China • Mass lobby for Tibet • UN slams China on torture

“This year's celebration [of Losar] will be different ... due to the fact that so many people have been plunged into the abyss of misery.”

From the blog of Tibetan writer and poet, Woesser

Dear friends



Free Tibet staff

As China tightens its iron grip on Tibet, Tibetans in Lhasa, nomads from across the Tibetan plateau, the young and the old continue to resist Chinese rule.

This year marks half a century since the 1959 Uprising and one year since hundreds of Tibetans lost their lives and thousands more were arrested; and yet Tibetans are still courageously undertaking symbolic acts of civil disobedience (see pages 3 to 5). That resistance is all too often in the face of horrifying Chinese repression: an overt and intimidating Chinese military presence in Lhasa and many other Tibetan areas; ‘show trials’ which lack even the most basic legal safeguards; disproportionate sentences for crimes no more serious than sending an email to a foreign friend; and curfews forcing people into their homes at night (see page 10).

Free Tibet’s role in amplifying the bravery of the Tibetan people, giving witness to what is unfolding inside Tibet and demanding action from our elected representatives is, in this symbolic year, more important than ever.

Free Tibet can point to successes, not least our evidence to the UN which led it to conclude that torture is not just the unsanctioned action of one or two individuals but is instead used by the state on a “routine” basis (see page 8). But we have more to do.

We must actively demonstrate the level of popular support for the people of Tibet, in order to prompt those we elect into action. This March please continue your support and act in solidarity with the people of Tibet. You can do this in a number of ways – send a message of hope on a Tibetan prayer flag, wear the new Free Tibet t-shirt, or join us at the rally in Trafalgar Square. You can even participate in the mass lobby (page 6) from the comfort of your home.

Whatever you can do, every action makes a difference

Stephanie Brigden

Director

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Free Tibet stands for the right of Tibetans to determine their own future. It campaigns for an end to China’s occupation of Tibet and for the fundamental human rights of Tibetans to be respected. Founded in 1987, Free Tibet generates active support by raising awareness about the situation in Tibet. It is independent of all governments and is funded by its members and supporters.

Views expressed in *Free Tibet* are not necessarily those of Free Tibet Campaign.

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Cover: A monk demonstrates in front of journalists at Jokang Temple in April 2008
Photo: Press Association



RANGZEN ARCHIVE, NEW DELHI

“ We are fighting for our very survival. Without the support of the world, we will lose. We are armed with portraits of His Holiness and they are „ armed with machine guns. ”

1959

In March 1959 thousands of Tibetans flooded on to the streets of Lhasa in an extraordinarily courageous display of national resistance to China’s repressive occupation of their homeland. While that Uprising may have ended ultimately in the tragic murder of more than 80,000 Tibetans by Chinese forces, 1959 represents just the beginning of Tibetan resistance; that resistance has continued and grown, undimmed, over 50 years.

Tibetans have demonstrated their resistance in countless ways since 1959: sometimes in the form of sweeping national uprisings; at other times in the unflinching courage of a political prisoner’s refusal to give in to torture and say Tibet belongs to China; and sometimes simply in the defiant refusal of a Tibetan to take down a photo of their revered Dalai Lama. On a daily basis Tibetans have found ways to rebel, hiding banned images of the Dalai Lama close to their hearts, lighting banned incense and whispering banned prayers. Such resistance has been largely non-violent, despite the constant and brutal provocation of the Chinese government. But what has characterised all forms of Tibetan resistance has been their determination to practise their religion, maintain their culture and continue to see themselves as Tibetan, not Chinese.

1989

The first major Tibetan uprising against Chinese rule since 1959 came in March 1989, just weeks before Chinese students defiantly

filled Tiananmen Square with their own message of hope, and in the same year that political change swept across Eastern Europe.

Protests in Lhasa and other areas of Tibet started as early as 1987 but the uprising began in earnest on 5 March 1989 when a small group of Tibetan monks, nuns and laypeople started a protest in the Barkhor area of central Lhasa. The protest grew rapidly as large numbers of Tibetans joined the protest. In an attempt to put down the protest, Chinese police threw bottles at protesters. Some Tibetans responded with rocks, prompting the police to fire indiscriminately into the crowd.

The use of firearms on unarmed Tibetans ensured that the 1989 protests escalated rapidly into a full-scale uprising. The Chinese government’s method for suppressing the uprising was extremely violent: footage smuggled out of Lhasa showed Chinese soldiers furiously kicking and raining blows on protesting Tibetan monks. Yet despite the ever worsening and indiscriminate violence of the Chinese soldiers in Lhasa, protesters continued to pour into Lhasa’s central streets, defiantly chanting Tibetan freedom slogans, demanding the return of the Dalai Lama and waving Tibetan flags. Hu Jintao, then Party Secretary and now President of China, declared Martial Law on 8 March. Despite Martial Law being lifted one year later, China’s crackdown continued for a further two years as Tibetans doggedly refused to stop their protests.

Tibetans knew the consequences of their powerful display of resistance: night-time

Above: Tibetan women watch People’s Liberation Army soldiers march into Lhasa in 1959



Above: Mass defiance. Monks demand the return of the Dalai Lama, 2008 spring uprising. Faces have been obscured to protect the identity of the monks for fear of reprisals

raids on their homes, followed by beatings, arrests and lengthy prison sentences. In the overwhelming majority of cases, Tibetans were arrested for nothing more than peacefully demanding the most basic freedoms of expression and the right to practise their religion. Among those imprisoned were two young nuns, Ngawang Sangdrol and Phuntsog Nyidron, whose passionate desire to see religious freedom in Tibet had led them to staging peaceful protests in Lhasa.

These two nuns, along with twelve others, clandestinely recorded Tibetan freedom songs whilst serving their sentences in Lhasa's notorious Drapchi prison. The songs were secretly smuggled out of the prison and out of Tibet before being distributed internationally. The nuns knew that by recording these songs of defiance and freedom their sentences would be extended and their torture worsen.

2006

In January 2006 the Dalai Lama made an impassioned plea at a teaching in India for Tibetans to stop wearing the skins of endangered animals. Tibetans at the teaching quickly spread the Dalai Lama's message on returning to Tibet. The result was dramatic: mass burnings of animal skins all over the Tibetan plateau. Alarmed at such evidence of the Dalai Lama's continuing and overwhelming influence the Chinese authorities responded with a fur-wearing campaign. As a symbol of mass defiance, Tibetans have continued to refuse to wear furs. One year after the Dalai Lama's plea, not one person was seen wearing animal skins at the hugely popular Lithang horse festival.

2007

Tibetans staged another act of mass defiance of Chinese restrictions on anything associated with the Dalai Lama in March 2007. Several hundred Tibetans gathered in Lhasa on 14 March to perform the banned ritual of conducting incense-burning as an offering for the long life of the Dalai Lama.

2008

By rising up in protest all over the Tibetan Plateau last year, Tibetans demonstrated to the world their emphatic rejection of more than 50 years of Chinese rule. While the 1959 and 1989 uprisings were largely confined to Lhasa and surrounding areas, the 2008 Uprising witnessed more than 100 protests right across the Tibetan Plateau. Monks, nuns, laypeople, students and nomads all participated in the protests in a clear indication of the depth of resistance to Chinese rule throughout Tibetan society. China launched a particularly harsh crackdown in an attempt to put down the largest ever challenge to its rule in Tibet. More than 200 Tibetans were killed, including children, and more than 6,000 Tibetans were detained in a matter of weeks after protests began. The identity and whereabouts of around 1,000 Tibetans still remain unknown.

China is deeply concerned that, one year on from last year's protests, Tibetans are preparing for an even greater display of resistance to mark the 50th anniversary of the 1959 Uprising. To meet this anticipated upsurge in resistance China has mounted a massive security lockdown over huge areas of Tibet. Lhasa is a city under siege with Chinese snipers positioned on rooftops ready to meet the slightest form of dissent. Huge numbers of troops have flooded into areas such as Kandze, Ngaba and Lithang which are known for their spirit of resistance and where some of last year's most passionate protests took place. Freedom of movement is restricted and communications (mobile telecommunications both internal and external, email and internet access) are severely curtailed. China has also sent out a chilling message that any Tibetan brave enough to protest in the run up to this year's 50th anniversary will face the severest consequences: a series of "show trials" of Tibetans has been staged in which Tibetans have been given harsh sentences out of proportion to the alleged "crime". On page 10 we report the case of Tibetan health worker, Wangdu, who was sentenced to life merely for passing on information about the situation in Tibet to contacts outside.

One year on: Tibetans prepare to resist again during Losar

Despite the pervasive climate of fear and threat created by the Chinese authorities to deter dissent, Tibetans are again preparing to openly show their resistance and defiance. On 25 February Tibetans should be marking the Tibetan New Year with traditional Losar celebrations. But Tibetans have decided that this year, apart from religious ceremonies, they will not be celebrating with the traditional banquets, dancing and singing. Normally Losar would not be observed as a mark of respect for a deceased family member. This year Tibetans will defiantly mourn all the victims of last year's crackdown in a symbolic act of peaceful civil disobedience and rejection of Chinese rule.



March 1959: His Holiness the Dalai Lama escaping to India with Khampa guard protection. © Tibet Images / DIIR

As soon as China's Communist Party had won the civil war in 1949 and established the People's Republic of China, it began to assert that Tibet was a part of China. By October 1950 the People's Liberation Army (PLA) was established in the eastern Tibetan regions of Kham and Amdo. In May 1951 China persuaded the newly enthroned Dalai Lama to sign The Seventeen Point Agreement during a trip to Beijing. In that treaty China promised to preserve Tibet's autonomy and its political institutions. (Following his flight to India in March 1959, the Dalai Lama made a statement in which he renounced the Agreement, arguing that he had been forced to sign it "under duress".) In September 1951 Chinese "liberation forces" marched in to Lhasa and by 1954 there were 222,000 PLA soldiers stationed in Tibet.

By the late '50s it was clear to Tibetans that China had no intention of honouring its pledge to respect Tibetan autonomy. Resentment of China's occupation had reached simmering point and it was clear that a revolt against Chinese rule was brewing. The spark for the revolt was an invitation by the Chinese army for the Dalai Lama to attend a meeting at Army Headquarters in Lhasa. The invitation insisted that he attend alone, without his customary escort of armed guards.

On 10 March 1959, fearful that the Chinese intended to kidnap the Dalai Lama and take him to Beijing, 300,000 Tibetans surrounded the Norbulinka palace. Over the next few days the uprising escalated. On 12 March, 5,000 Tibetan women marched through the streets of Lhasa holding aloft banners demanding Tibetan independence. Tension rose further as Tibetans erected barricades in Lhasa's streets whilst Chinese forces mounted machine-guns on rooftops. It is estimated that between

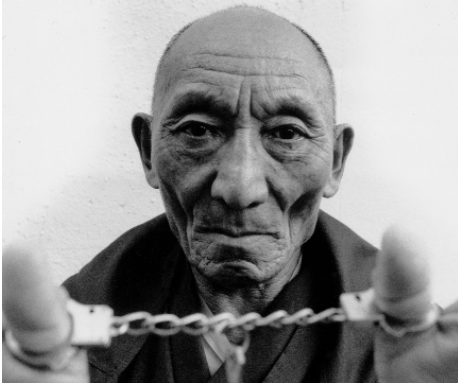
30,000 and 50,000 well-armed Chinese troops were in Lhasa while Chinese heavy artillery had been placed strategically outside the city. On 19 March the Chinese started to shell the Norbulingka. On 21 March, 800 shells rained down on the palace, slaughtering thousands of Tibetan men, women and children. Over a few days, more than 86,000 Tibetans were killed.

The Dalai Lama had already been forced to flee Lhasa on 17 March disguised as a soldier. Decades later, writing in his autobiography, he said: "the first thought in the mind of every official within the Palace...was that my life must be saved and I must leave the Palace and the city at once...Everything was uncertain, except the compelling anxiety of all my people to get me away before the orgy of Chinese destruction and massacre began".

After two weeks of perilous flight, the Dalai Lama crossed the Indian border on 31 March. The Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, announced on 3 April that the Government of India had granted the Dalai Lama asylum.

Get involved

Take action



Palden Gyatso served 33 years in prison and was severely tortured

Action: 50 years of resistance

Resistance March and Rally

Saturday 7 March 2009

March from the Chinese Embassy through central London to Trafalgar Square. Rally at Trafalgar Square for speeches by Palden Gyatso and others.

Assemble from 11:30 a.m. at the Chinese Embassy
49 - 51 Portland Place, London W1B 1JL

Nearest tube stations: Oxford Street, Great Portland Street, Regents Park

Join us in commemorating the 1959 Uprising and march in solidarity with the people of Tibet as we mark 50 years of peaceful resistance against Chinese occupation.

At Trafalgar Square join us for speeches, from Palden Gyatso and others. Palden was arrested during the 1959 Uprising and was imprisoned for more than 30 years.

Bring your Tibetan flags – the symbol for this year’s event - and wear Free Tibet’s latest t-shirt emblazoned with the banned Tibetan flag.



Free Tibet Flag T-shirt

Wear the Tibetan colours with pride this year by ordering one of our new Free Tibet shirts. Made from super-soft organic bamboo, this colourful shirt will certainly be noticed!



Available in standard sizes for £18 from our website
www.freetibet.org/shop

Mass Lobby for Tibet

On 10 March, on the actual 50th anniversary of the 1959 Uprising, we are asking people from across the UK to join Free Tibet and other Tibetan support groups to contact their MP to demonstrate the breadth of support across the UK for a free Tibet. Similar activities will be happening across the globe!

You can get involved in a number of different ways: Register with us now and join Free Tibet at the Houses of Parliament and actually meet your MP and find out what action your MP plans to take on Tibet.

If you can't travel to London on that day, you can still be part of the mass lobby. You can send an email, telephone your MP or send a fax. Why not do all three!

But whatever you choose to do - demand action from your MP on Tibet!

For more information, to download a lobby pack, or to see a sample letter, you can check out our website. If you do not have internet access please call Free Tibet. We're very interested to hear from those of you outside London who are able to join us! Especially if your MP is a front-bencher for the Government or one of the Opposition parties.

Let's show Britain cares!

Action: Mass Lobby

Tuesday 10 March 2008

Demand action from your MP on Tibet !

Join us at the Houses of Parliament and lobby your MP in person!

OR email, fax and telephone your MP from the comfort of your home or office!

For more information, e-mail lobby@freetibet.org

Prayer flags

One of the most iconic images associated with Tibet is that of colourful Tibetan prayer flags fluttering in the wind.

Dar Cho, the Tibetan for prayer flags, means to 'increase life and fortune for all sentient beings'. Each flag is inscribed with a Buddhist prayer and symbol, and the blessing contained on each flag is carried on the wind to everyone the wind touches. Each of the five colours represents a different element: blue is space; white is air; red is fire; green is water and yellow is earth. There are numerous designs, one of the most common being the Wind Horse, representing good fortune.

The tradition of prayer flags is thought to be over 2,000 years old. The practice of hanging the flags has sadly declined in Tibet as a result of China's occupation: although the flags are allowed to be hung in Tibet, many unique designs have been destroyed.



PHOTO BY PEDRO SARAIVA

Message for Tibet

This is your chance to send your message of hope and solidarity to the Tibetan people. At a time when Tibet is closed off to the world, take this opportunity to have your personal message carried on the wind to the people of Tibet to let them know that their plight is not forgotten! Later this year we will be hanging in Dharamsala our own prayer flags inscribed with the traditional prayers on one side and our supporters' messages on the other. If you would like to have your message included, please complete the form enclosed with the magazine with a minimum donation of £5 to support our campaigning work.



Free Tibet Solidarity Ribbon

Free Tibet is pleased to launch its new Solidarity Ribbon for 2009. These are a great way of raising awareness and can be purchased for £1.25 from our website or you can complete the form enclosed with this magazine.

www.freetibet.org/shop



Tea for Tibet

You too can help raise funds and awareness for Tibet in this anniversary year by hosting a tea break for Tibet. Sometimes the simplest ideas can also be the most effective, and having tea for Tibet is something anybody can do! Most of us like to start the day with a quick cuppa, so why not take this opportunity to spend social time with colleagues, catch up with friends and help Tibet!

You can stand up for Tibet even by sitting down to share a pot of tea!

How about arranging to meet colleagues in the tea room at lunch, or friends at your home or at a café, asking for a £1 donation for each cup. Post people invites a few days before, send messages via e-mail and to Facebook friends, and in no time you'll have your event ready; all you have to do is turn up and share a relaxing brew. If you're the person who usually makes the tea, your good deed can be rewarded with a donation from your colleagues.

And how about spicing up your tea break by bringing cakes and biscuits, sharing information about Tibet, having a Tibet quiz, encouraging friends to bring unwanted Christmas gifts for a raffle or kit yourself out with Tibetan flag mugs for the occasion?

For more ideas, visit www.freetibet.org/support/tea-tibet



Actor David Threlfall has tea for Tibet

Campaigns

Torture: a weapon against Tibetan resistance



Bodies of dead Tibetans brought to Kirti Monastery after Chinese soldiers shot at protesters, Ngaba County 16 March 2008

There are “extremely few cases of torture” claimed China in response to the UN’s probing questions into China’s record on human rights. But evidence provided by Free Tibet proved a very different truth.

In November 2008, China appeared before the Committee Against Torture for a review of its human rights record. The Committee asked the Chinese Government specific questions regarding the 2008 protests, including the whereabouts of those arrested and information regarding any investigations into deaths connected with the unrest.

Free Tibet provided written evidence to the UN Committee and, despite intense pressure for it to be removed, the evidence is available on the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights’ website. Free Tibet’s Director, Stephanie Brigden, also travelled to Geneva to present Free Tibet’s findings to the Committee during a special evidence session.

The Review represented the highest level of scrutiny of the Chinese Government by an independent international body since last Spring’s protests. The Committee’s findings provide an independent and impartial opinion on the situation in Tibet and support many of Free Tibet’s recommendations, including the call for an independent inquiry into the use of excessive force against peaceful demonstrators.

In its conclusions, the Committee supported Free Tibet’s evidence by confirming that the recent crackdown in Tibet has “deepened a climate of fear”. In addition, the Committee corroborated Free Tibet’s position that torture in Tibet is not simply the unsanctioned behaviour of a few officials but is “routine”. Although torture is prohibited in Chinese and international law, the UN has confirmed that torture continues to be both “widespread” and “routine”, especially for the purposes of extracting confessions. Not only does China fail to respect its own laws and

international obligations, Free Tibet has exposed that Chinese state policies create the very conditions where torture is likely to take place.

In July 2008, Free Tibet sourced information exposing how the Chinese Government in the Kandze region of Tibet (Ch: Gardze Prefecture) had drawn up a series of measures to purge monasteries and nunneries of monks and nuns deemed by authorities to have undertaken so called subversive activities (including communicating with foreign journalists). The measures included holding individuals in custody until “(s)he co-operates by telling the truth, confessing their guilt and submitting a shuyig [self criticising letter]”. Such measures create obvious conditions for torture because of the insistence on ‘telling the truth’ and the admission of guilt.

In response to the UN Committee’s questions on the whereabouts of those arrested after the Spring Uprising, of which at least 1,000 Tibetans still remain unaccounted for, the Chinese Government failed in the Committee’s view to provide adequate information. The Committee also criticised the failure of the Chinese Government to investigate the deaths resulting from indiscriminate firing by police into crowds of peaceful demonstrators in Kandze prefecture, Ngaba county and Lhasa.

Based on our research and the findings of the UN Committee, Free Tibet believes that the evidence represents a concerted policy by the state to use torture as a weapon against Tibetan resistance.



UN headquarters, Geneva

Britain rips up history and says Tibet is part of China

Last October British Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, reversed Britain's long-standing position on Tibet and announced that "we regard Tibet as part of the People's Republic of China". For 94 years Britain had merely recognised China's "special position" in Tibet. In a stroke, Miliband had changed Britain's position on the legal status of a country with which it had formed treaties and shared a border (due to its control of India up until 1947). The announcement of this momentous change was buried deep in a Written Ministerial Statement. No attempt had been made by the government to subject the proposed change to the scrutiny of parliament.

China was delighted. Until Britain's change in position, China was unable to say that the international community regarded Tibet as part of China because Britain did not. In a BBC interview Zhu Weiqun, who had led talks with Tibetan representatives, said that China appreciated Britain's statement on Tibet. China was also emboldened by the announcement and, just days later, aggressively blamed the Tibetan side for what it considered the failure of the Sino-Tibetan dialogue, effectively signalling that talks on the future of Tibet were over. Free Tibet has learned that the change in Britain's position was cited by Chinese officials to Tibetan representatives in Beijing as evidence of a victory for China and international support for its position that Tibet is a part of China.

Free Tibet led public condemnation of Britain's "rewriting" of history. In an open letter to the Foreign Secretary, Free Tibet accused the British government of a "betrayal of the Tibetan people". The Guardian, The Daily Telegraph and The Daily Mail all carried Free Tibet comment heavily criticising the British government's decision, pointing out that the move came in the same year that China had committed its worst human rights abuses in Tibet in decades. Free Tibet has also written to Parliament's Foreign Affairs Select Committee. We requested that the Committee scrutinises Britain's change in position on Tibet and that the Committee recommends an urgent review of Britain's strategy for engaging China on human rights and Tibet.

Weakening British position on Tibet

Free Tibet believes that British policy on human rights in Tibet has weakened significantly over recent years as its China policy has increasingly prioritised trade over human rights. Prime Ministers Blair and Brown have been hugely reluctant to condemn publicly Chinese human rights abuses, preferring instead to sideline human rights concerns to its twice yearly UK-China Human Rights Dialogue. The Dialogue is held in private and Britain has failed to incorporate into it mechanisms for monitoring any progress in China's record. Britain's reluctance to hold China to account over its abuses in Tibet represents a

failure to represent the concerns of British citizens who last year demonstrated forcefully against the Chinese crackdown in Tibet. Britain's position also stands in contrast to much firmer positions adopted by other countries on China and Tibet.



Europe

German Chancellor Angela Merkel stood down intense Chinese lobbying against her meeting the Dalai Lama in 2007, commenting that as Chancellor she would decide on whom she met and where. Last December French President Sarkozy was equally firm in insisting on meeting the Dalai Lama. At the time, France held the rotating presidency of the EU. His stance was endorsed by the French people who said in a poll that it was right for him to meet the Dalai Lama, even if it had an adverse impact on French relations with China.

USA

While still a candidate last year, President Barack Obama strongly condemned China's crackdown on Tibetan protesters and "the use of violence to put down peaceful protests". Incoming Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, has recently expressed the concerns of the US government: "We will condemn the use of violence to put down peaceful protests, and call on the Chinese government to respect the basic human rights of the people of Tibet, and to account for the whereabouts of detained Buddhist monks." Significantly, Clinton also noted that the US would "press" China on their concerns, both "publicly and privately".

Free Tibet would like to thank all its supporters who wrote to their MP expressing their outrage at Britain's change in position and who asked their MP to write to the Foreign Secretary demanding an explanation.

Harsh sentences for Tibetans as China quashes dissent before Uprising anniversary



Paljor Norbu, 81, Tibetan printer sentenced to seven years on unknown charges

considered unprecedented in its severity for a case involving the mere forwarding of information. The same court sentenced six other Tibetans to prison terms between 8 and 15 years for “providing intelligence” to the “Dalai Clique” (Chinese terminology for forwarding information to the outside world). One of the Tibetans sentenced is Yeshi Choedon (pictured), a retired health worker who was sentenced to 15 years on the charge of “endangering state security”. In a separate case, a 30 year-old Tibetan woman, Norzin Wangmo, was sentenced to five years imprisonment for sending emails and telephoning contacts outside Tibet about the situation inside.

Free Tibet has also learned of the sentencing of an 81 year-old Tibetan man, Paljor Norbu (pictured), to seven years imprisonment on unknown charges. Paljor, a traditional Tibetan printer, was taken from his home in Lhasa on 31 October on suspicion of printing “prohibited material”. His relatives were not informed of his whereabouts in detention.

Many of the ‘show trials’ have taken place in the Kandze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. Kandze is the prefecture where, according to eyewitness reports received by Free Tibet, Chinese armed police opened fire on a crowd of unarmed Tibetan protesters in the monastery town of Tongkor on 3 April. Protests continued in Kandze until June, some time after protests elsewhere in Tibet had been quashed. Free Tibet has received reports that Kandze has been flooded with troops since July and recent sentencing in Kandze is considered a further attempt by the authorities to deter protest in this restive region.

China has imprisoned more than 100 Tibetans for their alleged role in protests last spring according to Chinese state media. The sentences follow a series of ‘show trials’ in which Tibetans have been convicted of a range of offences, including espionage, and given lengthy sentences out of all proportion to the charges. A feature of the trials has been the absence of even the most basic legal safeguards in the run up to and during trial. Before being tried, defendants have routinely been held at secret locations without access to legal counsel. The harsh and disproportionate sentences described below are intended to send out a threatening signal that there will be the severest consequences for any Tibetan brave enough to express even the mildest form of dissent in the run up to the 50th anniversary of the Tibetan uprising this month.

In October Free Tibet reported the conviction the previous month of eight monks from Gyanbe for sentences varying from life to five years imprisonment. The monks had allegedly bombed a government building the previous April. Free Tibet learned that the case against the monks was mounted in the absence of even the most basic legal oversight and due process; from arrest to sentencing the monks were denied all access to family and legal counsel and were held at an undisclosed location. Their sentencing has only been officially acknowledged following Free Tibet’s reporting of the case to the Associated Press which gained confirmation from the court which tried the monks.

The staging of such trials in the absence of basic legal safeguards for defendants is increasing alarmingly in Tibet. In November Wangdu (pictured), a Tibetan public health worker, was sentenced to life imprisonment for allegedly forwarding information to people outside Tibet. Wangdu had earlier been charged with “espionage” by the Lhasa City Intermediate People’s Court. His sentence is



Yeshi Choedon (left) sentenced to 15 years for “endangering state security” and Wangdu (right) given life imprisonment for “espionage”

Exiled Tibetans gather in Dharamsala for special meeting

In the last edition of Free Tibet we reported that the Dalai Lama had called a Special Meeting of Tibetan exiles to take place in Dharamsala last November. The Dalai Lama said that the purpose of the meeting was to determine “the best possible future course of action to advance the Tibetan cause.”

The meeting was important because it consulted Tibetans inside and outside Tibet. Almost 600 Tibetans from the exile community travelled to Dharamsala to discuss future strategies. Their views were considered along with those of some 17,000 Tibetans inside Tibet whose views had been gathered in advance. Of those inside Tibet, more than 8,000 said they were willing to follow any policy promoted by the Dalai Lama; more than 5,000 said that China had failed to respond to the Dalai Lama’s “middle-way” approach and that they therefore preferred to pursue a strategy seeking independence; and 2,000 said they wished to continue with the middle-way approach.

Participants also strongly urged the Chinese government to “immediately stop the baseless and unimaginable accusations against His Holiness the Dalai Lama... which, has also contributed to ethnic tension between Tibetans and Chinese”.

Speaker of the Tibetan Parliament in Exile, Mr Karma Choepel, said after the meeting that participants had re-affirmed “that His Holiness the Dalai Lama is the sole representative and leader of the Tibetan people”. Mr Choepel also stated that the participants had recommended that “we shall not deviate from the path of non-violence”.

Monks beaten with spades and meat cleavers

Chinese police beat 50 monks at Kirti monastery in the Ngaba region of eastern Tibet in September.

Kirti is the monastery where bodies were brought after Chinese soldiers fired on unarmed Tibetan protesters in Ngaba county last year, killing at least thirteen. Monks at the monastery have since been subjected to strict restrictions on their movements. The restrictions are part of an intense security operation in Ngaba, aimed at deterring further protest in the run up to the 50th anniversary of the 1959 Uprising.

Last August eyewitnesses reported that the number of troops stationed in the local town had risen dramatically from 2,000 to about 10,000.

The latest incident at Kirti followed the severe beating of a monk, Jampa Lidja, after he left the monastery to go to the toilet. A security perimeter, beyond which monks are not permitted to go, had been placed round the monastery. Police guards claimed Ladja had walked beyond the perimeter and beat him severely. Ladja was able to walk to the monastery restaurant where he told monks what had happened. The monks immediately protested to the police that it was unreasonable to beat monks for going to the toilet and demanded that superior officers were called to settle the problem. Two truckloads of armed police, armed with rifles and spades, quickly arrived at the monastery. The monks lay on the ground and removed their robes to show that they were not armed. Their actions were ignored by the police who beat all the monks severely, using the butts of their rifles, spades and even meat cleavers. Five of the 50 monks were so badly injured they had to be hospitalised. The Times newspaper reported the beatings following Free Tibet’s press statement.

- **The latest round of the UK-China Human Rights Dialogue** took place in London over two days in early January. The Dialogue is supposed to be twice-yearly but China stalled on dates for the Dialogue session that was scheduled for last autumn. The January meeting was therefore the first of its kind since the Tibet Uprising of Spring 2008.
- **Chinese state media announced in January the creation of a new Tibetan holiday - Serf Emancipation Day**, to commemorate what it terms as “the emancipation of millions of serfs in the region 50 years ago” following the 1959 National Uprising in Tibet.
Source: *Xinhua*
- **China announced in October that press freedoms introduced for the Olympics would be maintained.** The new freedoms allowed foreign journalists to travel anywhere in China without official permission and interview anyone who was willing. But the new freedoms do not apply to Tibet and foreign journalists still have to obtain permission to travel there.
Source: *Foreign Correspondents Club of China*
- **The Slovenian climber who provided pictorial evidence of Chinese troops shooting at Tibetan refugees in September 2006 on the Nangpa La Pass** has been killed in a climbing accident. Pavle Kozjek, 49, died on August 25 in Pakistan after falling 2000 metres.
Source: *mounteverest.net*
- **Official Chinese state media reported on 18 January that Chinese authorities had launched a new “Strike Hard” campaign in Lhasa.** The authorities in Lhasa had run checks on 5,766 people and 81 had been arrested for alleged crimes. Two of those arrested were charged with having “reactionary music”.
Source: *Tibetan Daily*

Stay in the picture in 2009

Why your membership of Free Tibet is more important than ever this year

In 2008

Your support helped us shine a light on Tibet

In 2009

Your membership is more important than ever

Last year, hundreds of new supporters joined Free Tibet when protests against Chinese rule erupted across the Tibetan plateau.

Your membership amplified the voice of the Tibetan people. You enabled us to gather evidence of what was happening in Tibet and to push the issue into the eyes of the world's media and political figures.

One year on, over 1,000 innocent Tibetans are still missing after being arrested during the Spring protests in 2008.

By renewing your membership of Free Tibet in 2009, you will help us to build on the successes of last year and to continue the campaign for the oppressed people of Tibet.

Stay a part of the movement in 2009 by renewing your membership, and encourage friends to add their voices to the growing call for change!

To join Free Tibet or renew your membership

Write to us at Free Tibet, 28 Charles Square, London N1 6HT or call on 020 7324 4605 between 10-6 Monday -Friday
You can also join or renew online at www.freetibet.org/support

Your membership will help fund our vital work for a free Tibet