

FREE TIBET

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www.freetibet.org

In the exile capital of Tibet

free
TIBET

• Five days in Dharamsala • Tourism in Tibet • Book of Remembrance •



Free Tibet Director
Eleanor Byrne-
Rosengren

Dear friends

2015 is already shaping up to be a busy year. We certainly have lots of plans and I hope it will be a good year for you too.

Last year, the Free Tibet team put a lot of time and effort into developing a new three-year strategy. We're now ready to start putting it into action. One thing we'll be focussing on is building more support for Tibet and we'll need your help. There will be new campaigns that you can get involved in but you can also help by introducing friends and relatives to the cause – sharing emails or social media content; bringing someone along to an event; or simply passing on this magazine to someone else after you've read it. The more support we can demonstrate for Tibet, the easier it will be to exert pressure on politicians and other decision-makers.

As you read this we'll be preparing for the annual march commemorating the 10 March uprising of 1959. This is such an important date for Tibetans and the march is always a great opportunity for supporters to come together with the Tibetan community in Britain and show our solidarity with Tibetans in Tibet. I'm looking forward to meeting as many people as possible on the day.

I've just spent the last few weeks working with our research partner, Tibet Watch, on a report to the United Nations about torture in Tibet. China is being reviewed by the Committee Against Torture this year and this report is the first of three submissions we'll be making as part of that process. Torture testimonies are never easy to deal with. Nor are self-immolation protests and three took place in little more than a week around Christmas. So far this year there have been no more but it was a reminder of how strong Tibetan resistance remains inside Tibet. I hope you will contribute to the White Lotus Book of Remembrance (p8). It's our way of paying tribute to Tibet's fallen while emphasising our belief that one day Tibet will be free.

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Our vision is a free Tibet in which Tibetans are able to determine their own future and the human rights of all are respected.

Free Tibet campaigns for an end to China's occupation of Tibet and for international recognition of Tibetans' right to freedom. We mobilise active support for the Tibetan cause, champion human rights and challenge those whose actions help sustain the occupation.

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Cover photo: flickr.com/urish

Five days in Dharamsala

Free Tibet campaigns manager Alistair Currie writes about his visit to the centre of the exile Tibetan world.

In October, I travelled to Dharamsala, the Indian home of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile and the Dalai Lama. My few days there were informative, enlightening, and emotional.

After the Dalai Lama and tens of thousands of other Tibetans fled Tibet in 1959, the Indian government effectively gave the small hilltop town to the Tibetan community. The Dalai Lama established his Government-in-Exile there to protect and serve Tibetans across the world, and to represent those living under Chinese rule inside Tibet. Today, his political authority has passed on to the democratic institutions of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) and Dharamsala is home to many other organisations working for Tibet – including Free Tibet’s research partner, Tibet Watch. My visit, with our director Eleanor and senior fundraiser Jo, was to give us an opportunity to catch up with the Tibet Watch team and meet with as many other Tibet groups as possible.

My first impression of Dharamsala – after the vertiginous climb by bumpy roads from the airport – was how small it was. McLeod Ganj, the suburb of Dharamsala where the Dalai Lama and the CTA are based, can be walked across in ten minutes. Its streets are crowded with Tibetans, including many monks and nuns, and the Tibetan flag is everywhere – but it is also a tiny place to bear the hopes of a nation and, like many Indian towns, ramshackle and chaotic in parts. While the Dalai Lama’s temple and the buildings of the CTA are spotless, orderly and elegant and the town is situated beautifully in a temperate forest with spectacular views of the valley below, this is



not Lhasa – not the heart of a great nation and a rich culture but a refugees’ improvised home from home.

It was wonderful to finally meet in person the dedicated Tibetan researchers of Tibet Watch, whose network of contacts and analytical skills provide so much of the information Free Tibet uses to plan our campaigns and to inform the world and the world’s media about Tibet. While I was there we learned of the sentencing of Khenpo Kartse (see page 9) and it was impressive to see the team swing into action to ensure that the information was robust and reliable.

Amongst the whirlwind of meetings with the CTA, activists and other experts, a few things stand out. Seeing pictures drawn by political prisoners now in India of the tortures they endured inside Tibet was profoundly shocking. At the reception centre for Tibetan refugees, we saw sobering photographs of Tibetans’ treks across the Himalayas to freedom – walking for weeks through snow, many arrive frostbitten and dehydrated. Those who die en route sometimes cannot be buried and after what ceremonies are possible, must be left where they fall. Poignantly, the centre itself – a beautiful building with excellent facilities – is mostly empty. China’s tightened border controls mean far fewer Tibetans are now able to escape.

Two connected thoughts left the strongest impression on me. The first was the modest, pragmatic dedication of so many people to the

Continued...

Top: View of mountains from Dharamsala;
Right: Alistair.



Again and again, Tibetans told us they left because they did not feel they could be Tibetan inside a Tibet under Chinese rule.

cause of Tibet. Many Tibetans I met had been born there, others had never seen it but the sense of unity and purpose was common to all. The second thought was something even deeper. In a handful of days, we met countless people whose personal stories were of loss and sacrifice. One that stays with me is of a man who told me how he left Tibet as a child and his mother died a few years later, before he could see her again. He told me how she would remember him as a naughty boy, always in trouble, and never saw him grow into a

responsible man who worked to serve Tibet – something that would have made her very proud.

Why then did he leave? Because his family believed he could get a better Tibetan education in India than in Tibet. Again and again, Tibetans told us they left because they did not feel they could be Tibetan inside a Tibet under Chinese rule, and where the Dalai Lama could not set foot. Dharamsala is a mirror image of Tibet – a place where people are free to live as Tibetans but must give up so much to do so. Inside Tibet, Tibetan history is everywhere but to be fully Tibetan is impossible.

Waiting in the tiny departure lounge of Dharamsala's tiny airport, my visit held one last surprise. A smiling, bespectacled monk walked right past me. While millions of Tibetans long to see the Dalai Lama but have almost no hope of doing so, I was close enough to touch him.

Tibetans should not have to face the choice between oppression and exile, between seeing their revered leader and leaving their land behind. I learned a huge amount in Dharamsala that will help me to plan and implement Free Tibet's campaigns but the trip's greatest value was in reminding me of the importance of what we do.

Above: Alistair and a Tibet Watch researcher visiting the reception centre for newly-arrived refugees. Left: A member of the Tibet Watch team (identity concealed).

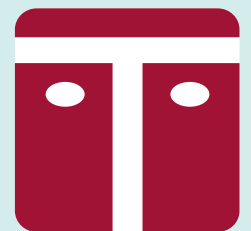


Thank you

A massive thank you to all our supporters who donated to Tibet Watch through the Big Give's online Christmas Challenge in December. We had a record number of donations and raised a whopping £16,512.28 for Tibet Watch.

Tibet Watch's research manager, Dechen, sends you her appreciation:

"Thank you so much for your support. It's not easy for us to raise funds because we have to keep a low profile to protect our sources in Tibet and keep our researchers' families safe from the Chinese authorities. Your donation will make a big difference to us for the year ahead, including keeping a roof over our heads!"



TIBET WATCH
བོད་གནས་ལྷ་ཞིབ་

Campaigns roundup...

YouTube pulls China accounts

As we reported in the last magazine, in the summer, Free Tibet's campaign forced Twitter to delete a hundred fake accounts set up to spread Chinese propaganda about Tibet. We subsequently uncovered dozens of bogus accounts on the online video channel YouTube, pretending to be Western individuals – many with the same fake identities used on Twitter. In reality the accounts posted or promoted videos featuring Chinese government messages on Tibet and other issues. Within a few days of Free Tibet supplying YouTube with a detailed dossier about the fake accounts, all had been deleted by the company.



Mixed fortunes for Tibet in EU and UK Parliaments

Free Tibet's supporters took prompt action when we asked them to back the group representing Tibet in the European Parliament last autumn. Supporters across the EU contacted their Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to press them to join a new Tibet "Intergroup" after elections in Europe last year. Many MEPs did express their support but unfortunately the group was not among those approved by the Parliament in a vote in November. The Chinese government had previously sent a letter to all MEPs informing them that it was "very concerned" about the reestablishment of the group.

Supportive MEPs will continue to act on Tibet's behalf in the European Parliament but the loss of the Intergroup – which had existed since 1989 – is a disappointing outcome for Tibet.

Supporters also contacted UK MPs to urge them to attend a debate on Tibet held in Parliament on 10 December, Human Rights Day. Many did attend and in a strong debate, the British government was pushed hard to take firmer action on China's abuses in Tibet.



Intercontinental sneaks open its Lhasa hotel

Intercontinental Hotels Group (IHG) has finally opened its luxury hotel in Lhasa – and tried as hard as it could to keep it quiet. The hotel has been the subject of an intense, Free Tibet-led international campaign because it markets Tibet as a luxury holiday destination rather than a brutally oppressed country. The company had been embarrassed by negative international media coverage, protests at its hotels worldwide and Free Tibet's exposure of its failure to meet international corporate responsibility standards. In contrast to the media fanfare with which it normally opens its hotels, IHG did not even issue a press release to mark the launch of the "Resort Lhasa Paradise".

In another embarrassing development for the company, it lost the contract to run its prestigious luxury hotel in Westminster, central London – the site of many Free Tibet protests. The hotel's owners clearly felt that a less controversial partner would be more profitable for them.



Free Tibet provides insights for rare TV report

When the national Irish TV channel RTE was invited on a stage-managed visit to Tibet in October, journalist Philip Bromwell contacted Free Tibet in advance of his trip to ensure he was equipped to see through his hosts' propaganda. His report – the first allowed by China inside Tibet for many years – exposed the difficulties faced by Tibetans in speaking freely and made clear that China's choreography meant that, in the reporter's words, "a true picture of what life is really like here remains out of reach".

Action

Visit our website to support our latest campaigns.
www.freetibet.org/campaigns



Culture shock

“I was stunned by this scene!
Can the lens be any closer!!!”

For China, Tibet is a resource to be exploited. In recent years, the Chinese government has woken up to the financial value of Tibetan culture and is marketing a romanticised version of Tibet to the Chinese tourist market. In a recently-published report, Tibet Watch documented what happens when Tibetans are treated as an exotic curiosity and centuries-old customs are reduced to Disneyland-style attractions.

More than 90% of the 15 million tourists to visit Tibet in 2014 were Chinese. Many are drawn to Tibet's beauty and remoteness by a desire to witness Tibet's colourful and 'exotic' culture. Unfortunately, those tourists also enter Tibet not as guests invited by Tibetans, but as a dominant majority paying a visit to what they have been led to believe is a remote and backward part of their own country.

For decades, Chinese people have been told that Tibet was a primitive

region that China 'liberated' from religious oppression and serfdom in 1950. Although Tibetan Buddhism is growing in popularity in China, that growth follows decades of Communist Party contempt for religion. Tibetans themselves are often portrayed as ungrateful for the gifts China has brought, while censorship and repression prevent them from telling their own story.

Tour guides are obliged to tell China's version of Tibetan history, and tourists are encouraged to visit picturesque religious sites and events, crowding out genuine pilgrims. As a result, the behaviour of Chinese tourists in Tibet can be insensitive at best and disrespectful and insulting at worst.

'Cameras like guns'

One Chinese visitor to Tibet was so shocked by the behaviour of her fellow travellers that she posted photographs on the internet, under the title "She is crying on the hill" – perhaps a

Opposite page, from top:
Chinese tourists stand on sacred Tibetan prayer flags. The sacred word should not be touched by the feet.
A tourist poses on a Buddhist statue.
A woman shields her face from cameras.
Tourists photograph a Tibetan prostrating as part of their religious devotions.



reference to a Tibetan woman clearly distressed by the attention of photographers. The visitor (who called herself “December” online) compared the lenses of the cameras to guns.

Of the shocking image on the opposite page, December wrote “I was stunned by this scene! Can the lens be any closer!!!”

The sensitivity of this visitor is, sadly, an exception. The version of Tibet marketed to potential Chinese tourists comprises a beautiful region, full of fascinating traditions and interesting historical sites but populated by quaint or even primitive people, whose feelings and concerns are almost irrelevant.

Chinese tourism to Tibet could have a positive impact, promoting communication and understanding between cultures. Instead, much of the money from tourism flows to Chinese-owned businesses and the actions of many Chinese visitors confirm Tibetans’ worst fears about China’s attitude to Tibet’s culture and its people.

Action

Tibetan culture belongs to Tibetans. You can read the full report online at www.tibetwatch.org

The White Lotus



Above: Tenzin Choedak before his arrest.
Below: The White Lotus Book on display in the Free Tibet office.

Since China invaded and occupied Tibet in 1950, over one million Tibetans have died. *One million*. It is hard to take in. Killings, mass starvation, executions, protesters who are shot, Tibetans who die fleeing, Tibetans who choose to die for their country's freedom by setting themselves on fire and prisoners who are denied medical treatment or tortured like 33-year-old Tenzin Choedak.

The son of a political activist, Tenzin had lived in exile but returned to Lhasa in 2004 where he dedicated himself to working on the environmental and health issues of rural Tibetans. Four years later, he was arrested on allegations of leading the March 2008 protests in Lhasa. Soon after, he was sentenced to 15 years in prison.

For the next six years, Tenzin suffered repeated torture. He lost his

vision and lived with chronic diseases which damaged his brain. He would often vomit blood. Emaciated, incontinent and unable to recognise his family, Tenzin's deteriorating condition eventually became terminal. His desperate family appealed to the authorities to let him go and he was released into their care on 2 December 2014. Tenzin died three days later with, according to Free Tibet sources, the words of the banned national anthem on his lips.

Tenzin Choedak's father, who now lives in exile, said:

"Whatever has happened to me and my family, I will never regret, and despite everything I am proud of my son and also of what I have done as a small contribution to the Tibetan freedom struggle."

Remembering Tibet's fallen

We have created the White Lotus Book of Remembrance as a way to honour the memory of Tenzin and the one million men, women and children who have died under China's rule.

Very many of these Tibetans, like Tenzin, died for their memory or vision of a free Tibet. In honouring their aspirations and striving towards



Action

To keep the vision of Tibet's fallen alive and make your contribution to The White Lotus Book of Remembrance, please fill out the form on the cover letter, call us on 020 7324 4605 or visit www.freetibet.org/whitelotus

Book

their goals, we honour them. The White Lotus Book of Remembrance is a way for those of us outside Tibet to pay tribute to all the Tibetans who have lost their lives, and may yet lose their lives, as a result of China's occupation.

We hope you will contribute to the Book. We warmly invite you to send a sentence of remembrance which will be hand written by one of our staff in the White Lotus Book. The Book will have pride of place in the Free Tibet office in London. But only for so long. One day Tibet will be free and, when that day comes, Free Tibet will deliver the Book to the people of Tibet in their homeland.

You may also wish to send a donation to accompany your words, though there is no obligation to do so. Any donation you choose to make will help us build the international support needed to bring about the vision of so many of those who have died: a Tibet where all Tibetans are free to determine their own future in their own country.

Thank you.



FREEIMAGES/JIN NEOH

News update...

Activist monks sentenced

Monk and activist Khenpo Kartse has been sentenced to two years and six months in prison, after being in detention for nearly a year (see last magazine). His sentence is far shorter than had been expected, possibly as a result of international attention on his case.



Khenpo Kartse;
Jigme Gyatso

Fellow monk Lama Jigme (also known as Jigme Gyatso) who has been in detention since August 2011 was sentenced to five years' imprisonment on charges of "inciting splittism" in September 2014. Apart from a court-appointed lawyer no-one else was allowed at the trial; locals doubt whether even Lama Jigme was present.

Lama Jigme almost died from torture in 2008 after being arrested on suspicion of leading protests. He recorded a video testimony describing his torture after his release.

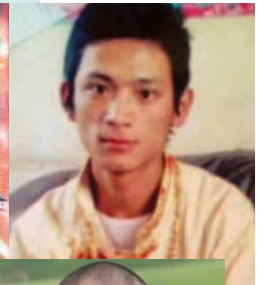
Fatal Tibetan protests

At the time of writing, five Tibetans have staged self-immolation protests since our last magazine, including three within eight days of one another in December. Four of the protesters died.

The bodies of Sangyal Khar, monk Kalsang Yeshe, 20-year-old Tsepe Kyi and Lhamo Tashi were forcibly taken away by the police, preventing local Tibetans from carrying out traditional funeral ceremonies.

Tear gas and shots were fired by police when fellow monks tried to prevent the police from taking Kalsang Yeshe's body after his protest on 23 December. A monk who was shot in the arm refused treatment for fear of being punished.

It is believed that Kunchok (no photograph available), who carried out his protest in September, survived but his whereabouts are unknown.



Below, clockwise from top left: Sangyal Khar; Lhamo Tashi; Kalsang Yeshe; Injury sustained in the protest after Kalsang Yeshe's self immolation; Tsepe Kyi.

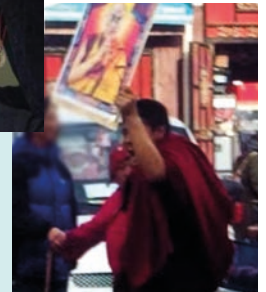
...News update

Solo protesters face heavy punishment

A number of individual Tibetans staged lone protests last autumn, carrying forbidden images such as pictures of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan flag and shouting slogans of freedom in public places.

Footage obtained by Free Tibet of Lobsang Trinley's protest in Ngaba County in December shows him being arrested and dragged away by police. A similar fate befell Doree after his solo protest in Kardze Prefecture in October.

21-year-old Lobsang Gendun was sentenced to up to ten years in prison following a solo protest he carried out during official Communist Party celebrations in 2013. He had been held incommunicado for a year following his arrest and stated in court that he had been tortured during his detention. Other solo protesters have faced sentences of up to three years for "separatist activities and plotting against the nation".



From top:
Lobsang Gendun;
Doree; Lobsang Trinley.

Nobel laureates boycott summit after Dalai Lama refused visa

In September, six Nobel laureates threatened to boycott the World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates in Cape Town after their fellow prize-winner the Dalai Lama was refused a visa to South Africa. South Africa's repeated refusal to issue a visa to the Dalai Lama is believed to be closely linked to its relationship with its biggest trading partner, China.

As a result of the controversy, the summit was relocated to Rome in December. Pope Francis reportedly declined to meet the Dalai Lama when he was in Rome for the summit – a Vatican spokesman implied that concerns about China's Catholic population lay behind the snub. The Pope has subsequently indicated that he is willing to meet the Dalai Lama and discussions between Rome and Dharamsala are ongoing.



Pope Francis.

Environmental investigation uncovers illegal coal mines in Tibet

Greenpeace issued a report in September highlighting four opencast mines in Amdo, eastern Tibet, which violate provincial environment regulations. The mines threaten nature reserves, water source conservation, wetlands and grasslands and could pollute the Datong River (also known as the Yellow River), which supplies millions of people with drinking water and irrigation.

In 2011, China's Ministry of Environmental Protection advised its local authorities to ban mining sites on protected land, yet coal mining and development activities continue to be carried out by a handful of private Chinese firms. As we have reported previously, many protests in Tibet have taken place because of mining and environmental damage. Even demonstrations calling for enforcement of China's own laws about environmental protection have been broken up with extreme violence.



GREENPEACE

Muli coalfield, Amdo.

Village leader killed

On 21 November, Ngawang Monlam, the leader of Wushong Village in Driru County, was killed by local Chinese authorities. Driru County has become a centre of resistance to Chinese rule. Few details have emerged but it is believed that Ngawang Monlam was killed because the authorities wanted to replace him. Many of his supporters were also arrested. During his time as village leader, the former monk promoted Tibetan Buddhism and culture and the economic development of his village.

Local Groups

Our Local Groups have been busy in the last few months. Here's just a taster of what they've been up to.

Tibet Support Group York – The York Group helped raise awareness and funds for Free Tibet by selling some of our merchandise at their Christmas stall.

Rotherham Tibet Group – Sylvia held a coffee morning fundraiser at her local church to raise awareness of Tibet.

Reigate Tibet Group – Reigate arranged a hike as well as a discussion evening with a member who had recently returned from



Left to right: Tibet Support Group York; Reigate Tibet Group; Suffolk Tibet Group.

Tibet. We helped them advertise the event so if you would like to organise something similar, please get in touch!

Suffolk Tibet Group – Peter had a stall at the local Green Fair selling Free Tibet merchandise and handing out our 'Tibet – Know the facts' leaflets.

Action

Our thanks as always to all our Local Groups. If you would like to join or set up a Free Tibet Local Group, please visit www.freetibet.org/localgroups or email localgroups@freetibet.org

Uprising Day

Tibetans and Tibet supporters will take to the streets of central London on Saturday 7 March 2015, to commemorate the 56th anniversary of Tibet's uprising in 1959 against China's occupation.

Please join us in standing up for human rights and nonviolence and to show solidarity with the Tibetan people.

There will also be an informal opportunity to meet fellow Tibet supporters and the Free Tibet team in a pub nearby later in the day.

For full details, please visit www.freetibet.org/march or email us at info@freetibet.org

“Sharing the London march with an ever-increasing number of Tibetans of all ages year on year since the mid-90s and hearing some of their personal experiences as we walk together makes the day a very special one for us.”

Carole Mahoney & Neil Bowman



Free Tibet raffle

Thank you to everyone who took part in the 2014 Free Tibet raffle. With your support the raffle raised over £11,000 – vital funds for our campaigns work in 2015. Congratulations to our lucky winners:

1st Prize: K Hewer
2nd Prize: M & R Walker
3rd Prize: C Stallard
4th Prize: R Moore
5th Prize: L Sales, M Allan, A Cooper

6th Prize: R Simpson, R Patel
7th Prize: R Byrde
8th Prize: S Haisman
9th Prize: S Yates

Welcome to our new Life Members: Gwen Backwell, Sally Goldsmith, Judy Hosegood, Tenniel and David Willingham.

China's Great Tibet Robbery: know the facts

1

China calls Tibet the "western treasure house". Since invading in 1950, it has used Tibet's resources to fuel its economic and industrial expansion.



2

Tibetan copper and gold deposits are worth nearly one trillion dollars to China.



3

China has moved more than 2 million Tibetan nomads off their land to open it up for exploitation.



4

Tibet is rich in silver, lead, zinc, lithium and other raw materials used in consumer products.



5

China's growing transport infrastructure in Tibet takes natural resources out and moves military forces and Chinese workers in.



6

Tibet's huge uranium deposits feed China's expanding nuclear power programme.



7

Tibet's rivers supply water to half the world's population. China is diverting and damming them for hydropower.



8

Tibetans' defence of their land is met with torture, imprisonment, teargas and bullets.



freetibet.org/robbery