

FREE TIBET

Issue 76 February 2017 | issn 1360-4864

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free
TIBET

• Human Rights Day • Resistance at Larung Gar • Why I protest •

“ People ask if the ‘free Tibet’ movement is losing its traction with the younger generation, but I was the eldest amongst the 100 odd activists who came to protest against Xi Jinping... The movement is being passed on to a new generation.”

Tenzin Tsundue



Free Tibet Director
Eleanor Byrne-Rosengren.

Dear friends

2017 is an important year. In September and October we'll mark the 30th anniversary of the 1987 Lhasa protest – the largest protest in Tibet since the 1959 Uprising. It was also the first in a series of protests which ran through until 1989 and was only suppressed by a violent crackdown and the imposition of martial law. The news coverage of the protests provoked an international response, which included the founding of Free Tibet. So, 2017 is our 30th anniversary too. We'll be sharing more information about anniversary events later in the year.

In addition, 2017 has been designated the 'year of protest' by the Sikyong and the Central Tibetan Administration. That suits us perfectly and I'm hoping to see lots of people out on the streets this year. The first opportunity will be Uprising Day on Friday 10 March. We'll be working with the Tibetan Community UK and other partners to help to organise events in London and are looking forward to doing something a little bit different this year. We'll be sharing more details soon.

Over the next few months we'll be continuing to campaign for Larung Gar and you can keep up to date with everything

that's happening in the campaign via the new Facebook page which we've set up with Students for a Free Tibet and the International Tibet Network (www.facebook.com/StandWithLarungGar). We'll also be taking on some new targets in our environmental campaign, Grand Theft Tibet. If you're on our email list then you'll have seen the first action already. If you're not on the list then you can sign up via our website and make sure you get every campaign action straight to your inbox. If you'd prefer to take action for any of our campaigns on paper instead of online then just get in touch and let us know. We're always happy to hear from our supporters.

With best wishes

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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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Front cover photo:
Larung Gar
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Human Rights Day in London

Saturday 10 December 2016 was Human Rights Day. This is the anniversary of the day, in 1948, when the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Free Tibet joined with other Tibet groups, as well as Uyghur and Chinese activists, to organise a demonstration and vigil to mark the occasion.

Human Rights Day came one day after China missed a deadline for responding to the UN Committee Against Torture so we adopted torture as the theme of our vigil.

We also focused on three political prisoners: Chinese blogger and activist Zhang Haitao, Uyghur intellectual Ilham Tohti, and Tibetan language advocate Tashi Wangchuk. An initial rally was held at Downing Street, where we also submitted a joint letter to the Prime Minister. Our letter called on the government to, amongst other things:

- Make a robust public statement condemning China's human rights abuses and specifically calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Zhang Haitao, Ilham Tohti and Tashi Wangchuk.
- Urge China to immediately ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
- Work multilaterally with other countries and utilise all available international mechanisms to hold China to account over its human rights abuses.
- Set benchmarks for the UK-China Human Rights Dialogues and raise human rights with China at every opportunity and at all government and ministerial levels.

After submitting the letter, the group then walked up Whitehall to Trafalgar Square where a vigil was held outside the National Gallery.

For Tibetans and Tibet supporters, 10 December is also the anniversary of the Dalai Lama's receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989. So our solidarity action for Human Rights Day was followed by an event, organised by Tibetan Community UK, commemorating the Dalai Lama's Nobel Peace Prize. This event included speeches from

representatives of Tibet support groups and our Director, Eleanor, spoke about the importance of human rights, outlined Free Tibet's work on torture and paid tribute to the bravery of the individuals who had provided testimony of their own experience of torture.

The event also featured traditional music, singing and poetry from Tibetan children. Once the formal part of the evening had concluded we enjoyed a wonderful meal and then it was time for gorshey – Tibetan circle dancing.

The next big event in the Tibetan calendar is Losar – Tibetan New Year – which starts in February. However, the next big event in Free Tibet's campaign calendar is **Uprising Day on 10 March**.

We will be helping to organise events in London so please keep an eye on our website and social media as we'll be sharing details a little nearer the time. We'll also let you know about events taking place at other locations around the UK as well as internationally. If you're planning to do something locally then please get in touch and we'll help to publicise your event. And if you need a new flag or t-shirt then head over to the Free Tibet shop, where we always have a good range of campaigning gear: www.shop.freetibet.org





A dangerous guest?

China continues to punish countries for hosting the Dalai Lama.

The Chinese government has kept up the pressure on governments around the world in an attempt to discourage them from meeting with the Dalai Lama, or even allowing him into their country.

The Dalai Lama's recent visits to Slovakia and Mongolia have seen Beijing take harsh reprisals, including cancelling high-level meetings and suspending talks on trade.

China cancelled trade talks with the Slovakian Prime Minister, Robert Fico, in November after Slovakia's President, Andrej Kiska, met the Dalai Lama the previous month. Slovakia's Prime Minister Fico told reporters that the meeting had "clearly damaged Slovak-Chinese relations".

Although the meeting was little more than a private discussion over lunch, and despite insistence from Slovak officials that they regarded Tibet as being part of the People's Republic of China, Beijing was infuriated, with Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying scolding Kiska for ignoring China's "strong opposition" to the meeting. "China is resolutely opposed to this and will make a corresponding response", she added.

Commerce between China and Slovakia, which at the time held the presidency of the Council of the European Union, is considerable, with some six billion euros (£5.4 billion) in trade between the two countries in 2015.

The Dalai Lama's four-day trip to Mongolia was even less political. He was not invited by the Mongolian government and spent his time at religious events and meeting with academics

and young people. Nevertheless, one day into the trip, Geng Shuang, another Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson, told journalists that China was "dissatisfied" with Mongolia and that its government must now take "concrete actions" to "prevent the disruption of the sound development of China-Mongolia relations".

Beijing cancelled several high-level meetings with Mongolia in response to the Dalai Lama's trip, including a visit by Mongolia's Deputy Prime Minister. In late December the Mongolian Foreign Minister, Munkh-Orgil Tsend, said that the Mongolian government was sorry and vowed that there would be no further visits from the Dalai Lama.

Mongolia has felt Beijing's wrath several times before as a result of hosting the Dalai Lama. In 2006, following the Dalai Lama's last visit to the country, China delayed an Air China flight to Mongolia's capital, Ulaanbaatar, for 12 hours. A visit by the Dalai Lama to Mongolia in 2002 was followed by China closing the rail links between the two countries for two days. Trade with China is important to Mongolia, which was also seeking loans from several countries, including China, to help resolve the country's debt repayments.

Mongolia joins a number of governments that have yielded to Chinese pressure over the Dalai Lama. In recent years France, Norway, South Africa and the United Kingdom have all refused to meet the Dalai Lama or even grant him a visa. The recently departed US President Barack Obama met with the Dalai Lama four times during his presidency, with the last meeting between the two taking place in June 2016.

Above: The Dalai Lama meets Barack Obama in 2016.

Campaigns update...

STOP TORTURE IN TIBET

Free Tibet submitted its Stop Torture in Tibet petition to the Chinese Minister of Justice in November 2016. A late surge of support helped us reach well over 5,000 signatures. The petition called on China to comply with international law and the Chinese Constitution, and put an end to the use of torture.

The submission of the petition came one year after China had its record on torture reviewed by the United Nations Committee Against Torture. The Committee found that the use of torture and ill-treatment was “still deeply entrenched” in China’s criminal justice system and stated that it had received numerous credible reports of Tibetans being subjected to torture. The report by the Committee contained a series of recommendations to China to reform its justice system. It requested that China provide follow-up information relating to a number of priority recommendations by 9 December 2016. China was also invited to provide an outline of its plans for implementing the remaining recommendations by the same deadline. As of January 2017, China had not responded to or even acknowledged these requests.

China prohibits torture under its own laws and is a signatory to the United Nations Convention Against Torture. However, it has consistently failed to implement these laws in Tibet. Free Tibet continues to receive information about Tibetans who have been tortured and ill-treated in prison or police detention. Disturbing testimonies detail prisoners being subjected to beatings with metal bars and electric cables; held in stress positions for extended periods of time; deprived of food, water and medical treatment; and confined to cramped, solitary conditions.

Musicians “arrested for singing” released from prison

Two musicians featured in our Tibet’s Jailed Musicians campaign were released in October after spending four years in Mianyang Prison in eastern Tibet. Pema Trinlay and Chakdor, both from Meruma Village in Ngaba, eastern Tibet, were arrested in 2012 after producing “The Pain of an Unhealed Wound”, an album celebrating Tibetan culture and protesting against the Chinese occupation. Its songs praised the Dalai Lama as well as Tibetans who have died through self-immolation. The pair were charged with “separatism” and were tried and sentenced in secret. Information about their exact whereabouts was withheld from their families.

In 2014 Free Tibet sent a submission to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights, raising Pema Trinlay and Chakdor’s arrests and disappearances, along with those of six other musicians. The UN responded by requesting that China reveal their status and location. China confirmed that they had been jailed after being found guilty of “seditiously splitting the state”.

Writer Theurang, who had shared a cell with Pema Trinlay in Mianyang Prison, announced the release of the pair on social media. He summarised their experience by writing “two cousins had to go to prison for singing.”



ROBED Tibet's
jailed monks
RESISTERS

Action

To find out more about our current Robed Resister Ngawang Gyaltsen and call for his release visit www.freetibet.org/take-action/religious-political-prisoners

Our Robed Resisters campaign, which sends solidarity messages to Tibet’s religious political prisoners and calls for their release, is still going strong, with hundreds of Free Tibet supporters writing to local authorities on behalf of Tsewang Choephel last autumn.

Tsewang Choephel, a monk from Nyitso Monastery in Kardze, eastern Tibet, was arrested in May 2015 with no explanation from authorities. It is thought that his detention is connected to him being a witness to the fatal self-immolation protest of fellow monk Kalsang Yeshe in December 2014.

Our current Robed Resister is Ngawang Gyaltsen, who has been in detention since February 2015 and does not yet appear to have been charged or given a trial. Ngawang Gyaltsen had been a monk at Shag Rongpo Monastery in Nagchu County in the Tibet Autonomous Region. He is also a highly-regarded artist. Prior to his arrest, Ngawang Gyaltsen entered into a dispute with Chinese authorities after they imposed a political re-education campaign on the monastery. He was subjected to close surveillance and repeatedly harassed, ultimately prompting him to leave the monastery. He was prevented from travelling or meeting friends before being arrested. Free Tibet urges supporters to write to the Chairman of the Tibet Autonomous Region, calling for Ngawang Gyaltsen’s release.

Several Robed Resisters have been released since the campaign began in late 2015, including Khenpo Kartse, Phurbu Tsering Rinpoche and Jigme Guri, whose release is reported in the news section of this magazine (page 12).

Throughout late summer and autumn 2016, we carried out a range of activities as part of our environmental campaign, Grand Theft Tibet. The campaign aims to challenge China's extensive programme of mining and extraction inside Tibet, and the social and environmental damage that it is causing to the people and their land. As mentioned in the last magazine, we have been focussing on two principal areas: the bottling of water from Tibet's glaciers and rivers, and the potentially hazardous extraction of lithium from its salt lakes.



Divesting from bottled Tibetan Water

Free Tibet has been targeting investors in Tibet Water Resources Ltd (TWRL), one of the Chinese water bottling companies operating in Tibet. BlackRock is one of several western shareholders in TWRL, which is bottling water from Tibet's rapidly receding glaciers to sell as high-end bottled water in China.

We held further demonstrations at the London headquarters of the investment company BlackRock. During one of the protests, Free Tibet staff brought boxes containing 66 plastic bottles, one for each year of the Chinese occupation of Tibet. The bottles contained messages from Free Tibet supporters, which Free Tibet later handed to BlackRock, along with a petition and a letter urging them to divest from TWRL.

Free Tibet will continue to put pressure on Western shareholders in TWRL throughout 2017.



BYD and Tibetan lithium

The second strand of the Grand Theft Tibet campaign saw Free Tibet and its supporters targeting London's public transport provider, Transport for London (TfL). TfL had completed an order of 51 buses from the Chinese electric vehicle and battery manufacturer BYD in August 2016, to run on two of its routes in the city centre.

Supplying buses to transport authorities in at least 40 countries, BYD is one of the world's largest manufacturers of electric vehicles. It has received strong support from China, which has granted the company access to Tibet's Chabyer Tsaka salt lake and the vast deposits of lithium carbonate contained within.

Free Tibet held dialogues with TfL's Director of Surface Transport and the Deputy Mayor for Transport, who carried out an internal investigation into the acquisition of BYD buses. The investigation found that there was no Tibetan lithium in any of the new BYD buses, but it overlooked Free Tibet's main concern – that TfL is doing business with a company exploiting Tibetan resources against the wishes of the Tibetan people.

Free Tibet and its supporters continue to press TfL to commit to finding an alternative future supplier of green buses, with nearly 2,000 Free Tibet supporters contacting them. Free Tibet has also contacted other transport authorities that are testing BYD buses, calling on them to look elsewhere.

Why I protest



by Tenzin Tsundue.

Your mobile phone most probably runs on a 'Made in China' lithium battery that China has mined out of my country – Tibet. China has been exploiting billions of dollars' worth of natural resources, like lithium, from Tibet for free while brutally suppressing Tibetan resistance and flooding Tibet with millions of migrant workers from China. I protest because this is not right. China has been plundering Tibet throughout its sixty years of military occupation and is now selling it everywhere, calling it global trade. Globally, there is hunger for trading cheap 'Made in China' products.

Around the world people are sympathetic towards Tibetans and love his Holiness the Dalai Lama. However most people do not know (or ignore) the fact that, in order to continue cheap Chinese manufacturing, the ancestral Tibetan nomads and farmers are being resettled in 'reservations', similar to artificial villages. Since the Tibetan language is being systematically replaced by Chinese, the fear of genocide has prompted over 145 Tibetans to burn themselves in self-immolations. I protest because most people do not know they are direct beneficiaries of the suffering of the Tibetans inside Tibet. Tibet is under multi-layers of colonisation.

Protesting at the BRICS summit

I protested at the BRICS summit in India, because Xi Jinping, who continues to run the dictatorship in China and denies basic freedom and democracy to the Chinese people, was attending. I'm a Tibetan refugee and it is my moral duty to stand up and say "NO!" However, I do regret that I protested at a place where the honourable Indian Prime Minister was also present. Tibet's independence is India's security.

The summit was held in Goa and was well policed, making it difficult to take action. I managed to get very close to the venue by

being careful with my timing. When the cops were out looking for me during the daytime, I was sleeping. I used to make my moves at night. In the end, I spent around 20 hours waiting in a marsh near the road where the motorcade of the leaders was to pass. On 15 October, I saw a motorcade approaching and stepped out with my banner and shouted slogans. This turned out to be the car for Russian President Vladimir Putin. I was arrested and spent three nights at the Sada jail. My only aim was to register a verbal and symbolic protest. I hope that, even jokingly, Putin mentions the protest to Xi Jinping, then my protest will have been successful.

Hope for the future

I have been fighting for the Tibetan cause for 23 years now. I did my schooling in a Tibetan refugee school in Himachal Pradesh and then got a BA from Loyola College in Chennai. I started organising small student rallies and exhibitions on Tibet. After doing my BA my plan was to go to Tibet, get arrested and from there start a revolution. I was arrested and beaten by the Chinese, but they told me, "You're born in India, you're an Indian. Go back." I came to Mumbai and did a double MA in English and Philosophy at Bombay University. I started writing stories and poems – that's my source of income.

Since then, I have been protesting against the occupation and also bridging the gap between the elder generation and the younger generation to prepare them for the struggle. People ask if the 'free Tibet' movement is losing its traction with the younger generation, but I was the eldest amongst the 100 odd activists who came to protest against Xi Jinping. Except me and one other, the rest were below the age of 20. They are college students who left their classes to come out and protest. The movement is being passed on to a new generation.

Resistance among the ruins



They were being forced apart under a plan dictated to them from afar, and their home, usually a haven for study and reflection, was now a demolition site.

Some people could be seen crying, others shouting in anguish as their colleagues and friends were escorted onto the coaches that would drive them out of Larung Gar and hundreds of miles away. Crowds gathered at the side of the road to wave a final goodbye, while others ran after the coaches, perhaps fearing that they would never again be this close to those on board. For Larung Gar's monks and nuns, both those staying and those departing, the sadness was unbearable. They were being forced apart under a plan dictated to them from afar, and their home, usually a haven for study and reflection, was now a demolition site.

It was not always like this. Set among rolling hills in a scenic valley in Sertar County, eastern Tibet, Larung Gar Buddhist Academy had become a prestigious centre for the study of Tibetan Buddhism after it was set up in 1980. It expanded over the years and by 2016 hosted over 10,000 monks, nuns and visiting students, with some sources putting the number anywhere up to 40,000 inhabitants. Tourists would return from trips to Tibet with beautiful photographs showing gold-domed monasteries surrounded by hundreds of distinctive red buildings that spilled out onto the surrounding hills.

But the site also came to the attention of the Chinese authorities, and by 2001 their attention had mutated into interference. That year a wave of demolitions and forced removals took place at Larung Gar, with some 2,000 buildings being demolished. In the following years there were further reports of people being removed.

And then, in June 2016, the Sertar County authorities, reportedly acting on behalf of China's central government in Beijing, issued an order requiring the population of Larung Gar to be cut down to 5,000 residents by late 2017. Going on the official figures, this meant cutting the number of residents in half. Taking into account the likely higher population, it meant expelling tens of thousands of people. Their vacated residences, along with old-people's homes, nuns' hostels and other buildings across the site were then to be flattened.

China did not merely seek to knock down Larung Gar's walls, it also wanted to get inside of them and take control of the monastery's daily affairs. The order imposed a system of joint management on the monastery that effectively put it under Chinese Communist Party (CCP) control, decreeing that CCP officials would outnumber monastic officials three to two. The monastery was also required to hand over financial management to the Chinese authorities. CCTV cameras were to be set up and screening procedures introduced to control who could enter the site.

These stifling, top-down rules had already been imposed on other nunneries and monasteries across Tibet with the aim of cutting them off from Tibetan society. Few things matter to the majority of Tibetans more than their Tibetan Buddhist faith, which courses like electricity through their resistance to the Chinese occupation. Beijing accuses Tibet's monks and nuns of plotting their opposition to the CCP behind the closed doors of their monasteries and nunneries. Surveillance, forced removals and forced loyalty to China are the weapons it has chosen in its attempts to neutralise the influence of these institutions in Tibetan society.

Nobody at Larung Gar was consulted about the scheduled demolitions, removals and other upheavals before the June order was issued and within a month this ominous plan had become a horrific reality. A Chinese work team, accompanied by soldiers and government officials, arrived at Larung Gar on the morning of 20 July 2016. They cordoned off whole areas of the site and began to dismantle and demolish buildings. By the time their work had concluded, areas of Larung Gar that were once homes had been reduced to scattered piles of logs, splintered wood and rubble.

The effect on Tibetans was devastating. Inside Tibet and around the world, they expressed their horror, with one likening the demolition to "destroying heaven". Free Tibet's Director, Eleanor Byrne-Rosengren, chastised



Residents weep (above) as homes are demolished (left). Larung Gar before the demolitions began (main).

the Chinese authorities for “bringing violence to a place of peace and spirituality”. The demolitions were also criticised by residents of Larung Gar, which, by this point, had been cut off from the outside world and closed to tourists and journalists. The grief at Larung Gar culminated in the most shocking and damning news of all, as reports emerged that between late July and early August, three nuns had taken their own lives. Two of the nuns, Rinzin Drolma and Tsering Drolma, left notes behind, blaming the government’s “harassment”.

Anger and sadness were quickly channelled into action. Free Tibet and its supporters reacted swiftly to the demolitions with a series of urgent letters, targeting foreign ministers and Chinese embassies, that were signed by thousands of supporters. Within a month the British Foreign Office had confirmed that it would raise the demolitions and removals with China, while politicians and representatives in the UK, USA and Canada joined the

international outcry with strong public statements calling for a halt to the demolitions. Through its Press Officer, the US State Department urged China to “cease actions that may escalate tensions”, while Congress’ Human Rights Commission called on China to “reverse course” and “stop the demolitions and evictions, rebuild and restore the affected infrastructure, and permit all those people under Chinese jurisdiction who wish to pursue their Buddhist faith to do so without government interference or ‘guidance’.”

Free Tibet and its supporters also took to the streets. On 19 October, in at least 20 cities around the world, Tibet campaigners held vigils and rallies, raised awareness through public speeches, leafletting and street theatre and presented letters and petitions to government officials as part of the Larung Gar international day of action. Protests took place around the world in cities including Buenos Aires, Delhi, New York, Paris, Santiago, Taipei, Tokyo, Toronto, Vancouver and Washington DC.

In London, around 100 people took part in a four-hour demonstration outside the Chinese embassy which was organised by Free Tibet, Students for a Free Tibet, Tibet Society and Tibetan Community UK. During the demonstration, Tibetans, Tibet campaigners and members of the public gathered opposite the embassy, chanting slogans and waving Tibetan flags and placards showing the damage already caused to Larung Gar. Members of the four organising groups made speeches and conducted interviews with journalists. As night approached, a one-minute silence was observed for the three nuns who had taken their own lives. Candles were lit and many of the Tibetans present conducted prayers before giving a rousing rendition of the Tibetan national anthem. Across the road, several lights could be seen in



Vigil in Daramsala.

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Padlocks bar residents from their homes.

the windows of the Chinese embassy, which had by now received hundreds of letters and emails demanding a halt to the demolitions.

Free Tibet's work on Larung Gar goes on, while disturbing details continue to emerge from the site. By October 2016 an estimated 2,000 buildings had been destroyed and at least 4,500 people had reportedly been removed. Many of those forced to leave had been coerced into signing documents in which they pledged never again to return to live at Larung Gar. Photo evidence from inside the living quarters showed that monks and nuns were being effectively forced out – locked out of their rooms while they were away at prayers and running errands. The Sertar County authorities put pressure on the leadership of Larung Gar to tell people to leave and religious ceremonies were cancelled.

The monks and nuns who did leave encountered new problems. Reports emerged of monks and nuns being prevented from joining new monasteries back home and, in November, a video emerged showing a group of nuns, who had been returned to the Tibet Autonomous Region being subjected to a distressing patriotic re-education process. The nuns, dressed up in military uniforms, were required to sing Chinese patriotic songs, affirming their allegiance to China.

And all the while, photos of Larung Gar itself continued to trickle out of Tibet, always at great personal risk to those behind the camera. There were pictures of piles of wood and rubble, and hollowed-out living quarters, evoking a ghostly emptiness in this place that was once so vibrant. Videos of the demolitions showed diggers almost casually swatting aside homes and other buildings as Chinese work teams cordoned off areas slated for future demolition.

The Chinese authorities already had their story straight – the demolitions and removals were being carried out



for health and safety reasons, to prevent overcrowding, to prevent the risk of fire. Such concern over the safety and wellbeing of the Tibetans in Larung Gar would be touching if genuine and in stark contrast to Beijing's heavy-handed policies elsewhere in Tibet. However, people all over the world, from the public to elected representatives, from Tibet campaigners to Tibetans themselves, have made it clear that they do not believe a word of this. They have said loud and clear that they stand with Larung Gar.

Action

Support our campaign to protect Larung Gar. Contact a Chinese embassy or your Foreign Minister and call on them to help prevent further demolitions. You can write your own letter or email, or visit www.freetibet.org/urgent-action-larung-gar-buddhist-academy

For assistance finding the contact details of a Chinese embassy or Foreign Minister, email Rachel on mail@freetibet.org

Tibet Match is back and this year it's bigger than ever before.

Donate to Tibet Match between 13th and 20th February and your donation will be doubled.

Visit www.freetibet.org/tibetmatch to find out more and donate today.

From their office in Dharamsala, northern India, Tibet Watch researchers collate and corroborate testimonies and eye-witness accounts of human rights abuses in Tibet, allowing Free Tibet to turn the international media spotlight on Tibet, provide evidence to the UN, and obtain the up-to-date information needed to deliver our campaigns.

News update...

Villagers detained in dam protest

2016 saw a series of protests against mining operations and land-grabs across Tibet, often followed by police crackdowns and arrests. In November, 20 Tibetans in Dechen County in south-east Tibet were arrested after protesting against the construction of a dam along the Mekong River that put at least two villages at risk of being submerged under water.

The previous month, residents in Yanmen, one of the villages at risk of being flooded, had been offered compensation in order to vacate their homes and relocate to a new area. The villagers felt that the sum of money was inadequate and petitioned the local government. They received no response to their appeal for dialogue and, on 15 November, work began on the dam. The following day, three vehicles connected to

the dam project were obstructed by residents of Yangdro, another village in danger of being submerged. Several villagers were injured by Chinese armed personnel in the ensuing clashes.

On the afternoon of 17 November, 20 people were arrested for disruption of public order and the obstruction of 'government administration'. Due to communications restrictions, the current condition of those detained and injured is unknown. The local government website reports the arrest of only four people.



Protest in Yangdro, November 2016.

Nine sentenced for Dalai Lama celebrations

Nine Tibetans, including monks, former monks and laypeople, were handed lengthy prison sentences last December after organising birthday celebrations for the Dalai Lama in 2015. The nine, most of whom had previously spent time in prison for planning or carrying out protests, were all arrested in late 2015 in Ngaba, eastern Tibet. No information was released about their location, status or alleged crimes until December 2016, when a court in Ngaba meted out their punishments, the harshest being for a 50-year-old monk named Dukda, who was sentenced to 14 years in prison.

A 44-year-old monk named Lobsang Khedup was sentenced to 13 years in prison. The others received sentences of between five and twelve years' imprisonment.

Birthday celebrations for the Dalai Lama are banned under the occupation, along with possessing photographs or recordings of him. Infractions are often met with long prison sentences. Despite such risks, Tibetans continue to organise and participate in these celebrations.



Dukda was sentenced to 14 years.

Jigme Guri released after five years in prison

The Tibetan monk and political prisoner Jigme Guri (also known as Jigme Gyatso or Labrang Jigme) was released in October 2016 after five years in prison. Jigme Guri, from Labrang Monastery in Sangchu County, was one of the individuals featured in Free Tibet's Robed Resisters campaign (see page 5).

Jigme Guri was arrested in August 2011. No reason was publicly provided for his arrest, which was believed to be related to a video he recorded in 2008. In the video, he spoke of the violent crackdown in Tibet at that time and of the beatings and torture that he suffered in police custody during a previous arrest for taking part in a protest.

Jigme Guri spent the first three years of his detention being secretly kept in a prison hospital. In August 2014, he was sentenced to five years in prison for "inciting splittism" and transferred to a prison in Lanzhou. In January 2016, Jigme Guri told his family that the prison authorities were planning to return him to a medical facility

even though he was not ill. In March, his family was informed he had been taken to the prison hospital but prison authorities refused to say why, stating only that his situation was not serious.

After serving his five-year sentence Jigme Guri was released in secret and returned home during the night. Officials warned his family not to give him a traditional welcome – which involves the presentation of khatas, Tibetan ceremonial scarves – but the family ignored this command.

Despite his release, Jigme Guri remains subject to numerous conditions that prohibit him from wearing robes or returning to, or even entering, Labrang Monastery. In December 2016 he was taken to hospital in response to his diabetes, high blood pressure and problems with his heart, liver and eyes.



Jigme Guri in 2014.

...News update

Prisoner releases across Tibet in late 2016

There was some more good news from Tibet in late 2016 with several other releases. Teacher and musician Jamyang Kunkhen was released last August having served a nine year sentence. He was detained on 22 August 2007 after protesting against the arrest and imprisonment of Runggye Adak – a nomad and highly respected local figure in Lithang County who was sentenced to eight years in prison after he took to the stage at a horse racing festival to call for the return of the Dalai Lama to Tibet. Jamyang Kunkhen was tortured and beaten during his interrogation sessions and suffered further torture in prison; he reportedly also had a stroke, for which he received no treatment. Following his release he has been living under surveillance and his health continues to be poor.

The monk Ludup was released from prison early in September 2016 after serving four years of a five year sentence. He was arrested in connection with the self-immolation of 18-year-old monk Lobsang Lobzin in July 2012 at Kirti monastery in Ngaba, eastern Tibet. He reached home the day after his release, receiving a warm welcome from fellow monks and several former prisoners who had spent time with him in jail.

Choezin was also released in September, having spent three years in prison. He was arrested in 2013 following a fatal self-immolation protest by his sister, Kalkyi, at Jonang Monastery in Ngaba. He was

arrested under a 'murder' law introduced in 2012 that stipulates harsh punishments for the families or communities of Tibetans that carry out self-immolations. Choezin was greeted by friends, family and neighbours on returning home. The following day, he visited Jonang monastery to offer a prayer at the site of his sister's self-immolation.

Dolma Tso, who was also arrested and imprisoned under the 'murder' law in 2013, was released in December 2016. She had been imprisoned after the self-immolation protest of Kunchok Tseten, whose body she helped to move into a vehicle. While imprisoned Dolma Tso was tortured and, in December 2015, prison guards attempted to force her to have an operation against her will. A local court even contacted her family, telling them that she was in a critical condition and asking them to consent to the operation. Dolma Tso managed to contact her family and tell them not to agree to the operation. Dolma Tso was welcomed by hundreds of Tibetans on her release and was presented with many more khatas than she could wear at once.



Dolma Tso on her release.

“We are destined to self-immolate”

On the afternoon of 8 December 2016, Tashi Rabten, a former monk and father of two, set himself alight in Machu County, eastern Tibet. As he walked, still burning, along the road from the town centre, he shouted slogans calling for the return of the Dalai Lama and for Tibet to be free. He soon collapsed to the ground as a crowd gathered around him to say prayers. The body was later removed by police.

The protest and dying moments were caught on camera and video by passers-by and within an hour had spread around Tibetan social media. On 9 December, the Tibetan community and Tibet supporters in Dharamsala, India, held a vigil for Tashi Rabten, lighting candles and forming a procession in the street.

It soon emerged that Tashi Rabten had composed a letter on the day of his death, in which he gave his reasons for self-immolating and expressed a defiant stance against the occupation, which he blamed for destroying Tibet's culture and religion. Hauntingly he said that Tibetans “are not scared of death”, but are “destined to self-immolate in protest for being kept apart from our own faith and nation.”

The Chinese authorities consistently impose harsh crackdowns following self-immolation protests, and within a day of Tashi Rabten's death, his wife, Bhopey, and two

children were taken into custody. Relatives who approached the local authorities asking for Tashi Rabten's body so that they could conduct funeral rites were also detained, as well as bystanders who had been caught on camera. Tashi Rabten's family members were released the following week, with the two daughters being let out of prison one day before Bhopey. While in detention, Bhopey was reportedly tortured and forced to sign an agreement stating that Tashi Rabten had only carried out his protest because of domestic problems, and that it had nothing to do with Chinese policies in Tibet.

Tashi Rabten was the cousin of Tsering Kyi, a 20-year-old student who died after carrying out a self-immolation protest in Machu in 2012. He was also the third Tibetan known to have carried out a self-immolation protest in Tibet in 2016, following Sonam Tso, a mother of five who died after setting herself on fire in March, and Kalsang Wangdu, an 18-year-old monk who self-immolated in February. Dorjee Tsering, a 16-year-old Tibetan, also died in India in February three days after setting himself alight. More than 140 people are known to have set themselves on fire inside Tibet since March 2009 in protest against the Chinese occupation. Tashi Rabten's note ended with him expressing his desire to see Tibetans living “like genuine people on our own land.”

Letters



FRANCOIS DE HALLEUX

If you have a question or comment that you would like to see published in the next magazine, do get in touch with us by email at letters@freetibet.org, over the phone on 020 7324 4605 or by post to:
Letters, Free Tibet,
28 Charles Square,
London N1 6HT.

Please note we cannot guarantee publication of each letter we receive. Thank you!

Does anybody know what usually happens to the family members of self-immolation protesters?

Question submitted via Facebook.

In an attempt to deter self-immolation protests, the Chinese authorities have introduced laws that allow them to hold those who “encourage or facilitate” self-immolations to be held criminally responsible for “intentional homicide”. These laws have been used to punish the family members of self-immolation protestors with arrests, fines and restrictions on travel and communication. After his sister’s fatal self-immolation in 2013, Choezin was charged with involvement in her death and sentenced to three years in prison.

Family members are usually questioned about the incident and warned against talking or sharing information. The authorities will often try and get the family to say that the self-immolation was triggered by personal, rather than political, reasons. They may use bribery, intimidation or both. In 2013, Dolma Kyab was arrested after his wife self-immolated and he refused to say it was for personal reasons. He ended up being charged with her murder and sentenced to death. However, this was an extreme case. Arrests are common but most family members are released after a few days, as was the case for Tashi Rabten’s family (see page 13).

Thank YOU guys for your tireless efforts, I’m proud to have contributed, however small that contribution has been, and am just sad that it’s necessary. Keep it up and keep us supporters in the loop.

All the best, Andrea

Hi Andrea
Thank you for your kind words and for supporting Free Tibet. All contributions are valuable and it is supporters like you who keep us going.

Dear Free Tibet

I would like to know what the Free Tibet organisation do effectively to help people in Tibet. The places where they live are being destroyed. Do you provide them with education, accommodation or money? What are you doing and what can you do to help them?

**Best Wishes,
Joana**

Dear Joana

Thank you for your question. Free Tibet was created to raise public awareness of the situation in Tibet and to campaign for an end to China’s occupation. We are a political organisation rather than a charitable one. This means we focus on campaigning and lobbying rather than providing services or humanitarian aid to Tibetans. And as China’s influence grows, it is vital that we keep the pressure on governments and international bodies. The political nature of our work also means that we are prohibited from accessing Tibet and unable to communicate directly with Tibetans inside Tibet because doing so would place them at risk of arrest.

At an individual level, we often hear anecdotes about how international pressure on a case has helped. It’s rare for a political prisoner in Tibet to be released as a result of campaigning but we do hear about sentences being reduced. We also hear about improvements in conditions: a bit more food, a family visit, torture decreasing or even stopping. It makes a huge difference to the individual concerned. In addition, we hear from Tibetans that the solidarity matters. They are often disappointed by governments but draw strength and hope from knowing that ordinary people know the truth and care about Tibet and stand with them.

Supporter activities

Tea For Tibet

Last year saw the launch of our new fundraising initiative Tea For Tibet, a great way for supporters to hold events of any size or format to show support for Tibet. Our supporters have held a great variety of events to raise both awareness of the Tibetan cause and money to support our vital campaigning work.

Many people organising events have focussed on the 'Tea' aspect, inviting friends round for a cuppa and a chat, or taking an hour off at work to hold a Tea For Tibet with their colleagues (as we did in our office). Some events have been more adventurous, with one supporter in Norwich holding an open mike night in the Virgin Media lounge, raising a huge £206! Thanks to everyone who has already been involved, if you'd like to run your own event – no matter how big or small – contact helen@freetibet.org.



From top: Tea For Tibet at home; a musician performs in Aberdeen; Tenzin's bike Tour.

Screening of Little Tibet 2 in Grampian

In November, Tibet Support Group Grampian held a film screening at the University of Aberdeen. They showed *A Mother's Son*, a film telling the story of a 16-year-old Tibetan who self-immolated in February 2016, followed by a Q&A with the director via Skype and some Tibetan music. The event was attended by members of the public and students and was combined with an exhibition on Tibetans who have self-immolated.



Bike tour to the Kalachakra for Larung Gar

Tenzin Rickchok Rinpoche set off on a motorbike tour to raise awareness of human rights violations in Tibet, with a focus on Larung Gar. With his motorbike adorned with information, signs and Tibetan flags, Tenzin Rickchok Rinpoche made the three day journey to the Kalachakra ceremony in Bodhgaya, Northern India; an amazing way to spread the news of the demolitions at Larung Gar.

For the latest information on activities by Tibet groups and contact details for the groups themselves, visit our [local groups page](http://www.freetibet.org/take-action/local/uk) at www.freetibet.org/take-action/local/uk. If you're interested in setting up a group or fundraising for Free Tibet, please get in touch with us at mail@freetibet.org

March 10

We will be organising events to mark Tibetan uprising day on Friday 10 March 2017. Keep an eye on our website and social media for more information nearer the time.



Free Tibet are delighted to welcome our new *Mi Tse* (life long) supporter: David Last



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