

FREE TIBET

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free
TIBET



STOLEN

• Defiance at Kalachakra • Year of the Campaign • Larung Gar destruction •



Free Tibet Director
Eleanor Byrne-Rosengren.

Dear friends

With this magazine we are able to bring you some of the results from our opinion poll on Tibet. You can read about the poll on page 13 and see some of the headline results on the back cover. The data we gathered is very interesting and will certainly inform how we plan our campaigns.

One of the key messages is that not enough people know about Tibet. Many people don't know that Tibet is a country or that it's occupied. This matters because the poll shows that the level of concern about human rights and the political situation in Tibet is far greater among those people who do know about the occupation.

We will use the data from the poll to try and reach more people but there are simple ways that you can help us. When you've finished reading this magazine, you could offer it to a friend, relative or colleague. Lots of people share or talk about interesting articles that they've read, so it's an easy way to start a conversation about Tibet.

We're hoping to have lots of interesting conversations ourselves over the summer. The Free Tibet team will be heading out to

at least four festivals and working hard to recruit new Tibet supporters. We'll also have our annual Summer Shindig in London. You can read about our current festival plans on page 6 but keep an eye on our website and social media for updates and details of the Summer Shindig.

If you're attending any festivals yourself then don't forget to take a look at our merchandise catalogue as we have some new clothing in stock which would suit the festival vibe perfectly. And remember that a Tibetan flag is a fantastic way of marking out your tent.

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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Defiant Tibetans attend Kalachakra

There were spectacular scenes in northern India in January as over 200,000 Tibetan Buddhists gathered in Bodh Gaya to attend the Kalachakra teachings conducted by the Dalai Lama. While many of our readers would have been preparing to return to work on 2 January, for the pilgrims who had travelled to attend the Kalachakra this was the first of the 12 days of ceremony that are believed to activate the seed of enlightenment lying dormant in their minds.

Kalachakra means 'wheel of life' in Sanskrit. It is one of the most important rituals in Tibetan Buddhism. It is typified by its colourful, intricate sand mandalas, which are made over the course of several days and require expert levels of precision.

Pilgrims from some 90 countries made the journey to Bodh Gaya. Two members of Free Tibet's research partner, Tibet Watch, were present at this year's Kalachakra, as well as

Namgyal, Free Tibet's Finance Officer, who described herself as feeling like a "drop in a sea of humanity" at the ceremony, which had as its backdrop Bodh Gaya's spectacular Mahabodhi Temple.

Among the hundreds of thousands making up this sea of humanity, were around 1,000 who had come from Tibet. For them, this was not just a trip driven by devotion, but also by resistance; Beijing had issued a series of threats to those thinking of making the journey from occupied Tibet for an audience with the Dalai Lama.

In autumn 2016, the Chinese government hit Tibetans with a series of orders to dissuade them from travelling to Bodh Gaya, ordering them to hand in their travel documents and, in some cases, simply going door to door to confiscate them. Officials also warned the families of Tibetans who were already in India, or on their way via Nepal, that their travelling relatives had to return to Tibet. The Chinese government even asked its travel agencies and airlines to cancel a series of bookings made for flights to Nepal from several Chinese airports.

Once the Kalachakra got underway in January, Beijing upped the pressure, blackmailing those attending, their relatives and their monasteries with a range of threats including fines, withdrawal of government aid and removal from their jobs.

These threats were the final straw for some of those attending and, in the following days, Tibetans started flooding home, some of them spending hundreds of pounds to hire cars to speed up their return to the border. But for others, no earthly threats could move them to return before the ceremony had concluded.

"Many are returning to Tibet unable to receive the Kalachakra initiation by His Holiness due to intimidation by the Chinese authorities", one devotee told Tibet Watch. "This is a once in a lifetime opportunity for me; therefore, if I return without receiving the initiation I will forever regret it. If this costs me imprisonment after my return as a punishment, I'm ready to face it with contentment."

The Tibetans missing from the rest of the ritual were acknowledged by the Dalai Lama, who told the crowd in Bodh Gaya that they were still there in spirit and able to receive the Kalachakra empowerment in this way. On 14 January the ceremony came to a spectacular close and, as the remaining Tibetans and Buddhist devotees prepared to return home, many of them would have been wishing for the day when the Dalai Lama could return to Tibet and conduct the Kalachakra from Lhasa.



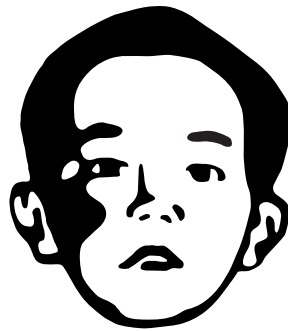
Left: The Mahabodi temple in Bodh Gaya. Background: a sand mandala.

Campaigns update...

Panchen Lama campaign

On 25 April 1995, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima turned six years old. Barely a month later, he became the world's youngest political prisoner. Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, revered by Tibetans as the Panchen Lama (the second most senior figure in Tibetan Buddhism), was kidnapped by the Chinese authorities that year and has been missing ever since. Despite Beijing's claims that he is safe and does not want to be disturbed, Tibetans continue to demand to know where he is.

Free Tibet and Students for a Free Tibet marked the Panchen Lama's 28th birthday in April by launching a worldwide effort to challenge Beijing to reveal his location and provide proof to the world that he is safe. We want supporters to flood the Chinese authorities with cards from around the world, celebrating the Panchen Lama's birthday and requesting that the Chinese authorities pass the cards on to the Panchen Lama and reveal where he is. We will also push for governments to raise his case with Beijing.



FREE THE PANCHEN LAMA

To get involved, you can buy a birthday card or get creative and make your own. Write your message and send them to our office in London, we will then pass the cards on to the Chinese authorities. You can find our address on the inside cover of this magazine. There are more resources on our Facebook page, including campaign updates, photos of other people's actions from around the world and missing person posters that you can print out and put up in your community to spread the word about the campaign. To see more visit www.facebook.com/freepanchenlama17.

Tashi Wangchuk

Tashi Wangchuk, the Tibetan language advocate, remains in prison and awaiting a trial for "attempting to split the Chinese state". On 26 January, the one year anniversary of his detention, we held a loud and well-attended vigil at the Chinese Embassy in London, calling for his immediate release. In addition, we urged Ministers of Foreign Affairs around the world to push for his release, and to ensure that, if Tashi Wangchuk does stand trial, they send international observers. Tashi Wangchuk has been due to stand trial since the summer of 2016, when an investigation into his case was concluded. He faces up to 15 years in jail if found guilty. In a surprising move, the investigation was reopened in December but a trial date has still not been set. We do know that the authorities in China are well aware of the level of international scrutiny on Tashi Wangchuk's case.



Action

Contact your ambassador in China to ask them to enquire about Tashi Wangchuk and send observers to his trial if it goes ahead.

www.freetibet.org/free-trial

We continue to campaign against China's exploitation of Tibet's resources. In March, Free Tibet launched a petition targeting Paris's public transport authority, RATP, telling them not to purchase buses from the Chinese company BYD.

BYD, which is based in Shenzhen, China, is one of the companies that has benefitted from China's regime of mining and extraction in Tibet. It has been harvesting lithium from Tibet's Lake Zabuye since 2010, when the Chinese government granted it rights to the lake's precious lithium salts. BYD uses these lithium salts to make batteries for its renewable energy buses. It has sold these buses to public transport authorities around the world, with London's transport authority buying over 50 last year. RATP, which has been conducting trials of the buses, is currently deciding whether or not to purchase more.



Action

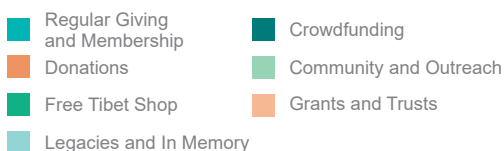
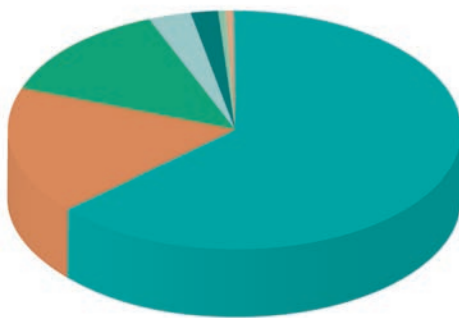
To add your name to our petition and tell RATP not to put any more BYD buses on the streets of Paris visit www.freetibet.org/lithium-tibet. Or if you have no internet access, give us a call on 020 7324 4605.

Your donations at the heart of our campaigning

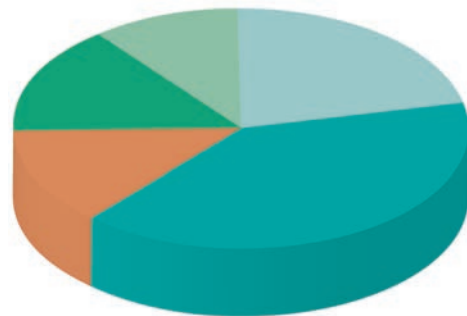
The charts below show how Free Tibet's income was raised and the breakdown of expenditure for the financial year 2016/17. Most of our income comes from small, regular or one-off donations from Tibet supporters, as well as from sales through our online shop.

Thank you for your support over the last year – we couldn't have the impact we do without you.

Income



Expenditure



Campaigning further afield

UK festivals now attract a reported 14 million people – that’s nearly one in four of the country’s entire population.

With this fact neatly tucked into a campaigns backpack, Free Tibet has set its sights on four summer events this year ... WOMAD in late July, The Green Gathering in early August, Greenbelt at the end of August and – with any luck – Green Man in mid-August.

Crowdfunded research undertaken on behalf of Free Tibet has recently highlighted that quite a lot of people think that Tibet is a mountain in Asia ... or a fictional place! Throughout the summer Free Tibet will be able to reach out to many festival-goers and share the daunting – yet inspiring – reality of Tibet and its people. By attending these events Free Tibet plans to spread the word among festival-goers about the campaign for Tibetan freedom ... all in time for our 30th anniversary!

Last year Free Tibet attended both WOMAD and Vale Earth (on the island of Guernsey) where staff met the general public and veteran supporters alike and the feedback was great. Hosting a water pistol shooting range for kids to find out about Tibet’s imperilled rivers, through to fun Tibetan flag tattoos and distributing colourful campaign materials, Free Tibet’s team had a productive and useful summer meeting lots of new people.

This year, again, our primary awareness-raising drive will be through our physical presence – talking to people at our tent, encouraging people to add their names to petitions and learn a bit more about Tibet. We are also planning to host and attend fringe events at the various festivals where we will be able to present core campaigns to the wider public. The festivals present an opportunity to highlight not only the current political situation, but also Tibet’s beautifully unique culture.

Human rights violations, religious freedom and Tibet’s awe-inspiring environment are major concerns to Free Tibet’s support-base and the festival programme will reflect these areas of focus. In conjunction with our outreach programme at the festivals, we are also planning to reinforce our attendance with a big presence in the world wide ‘cloud’ by posting content on social media to reach the growing number of people using digital data while at festivals.

All we can hope for now is clear skies and mud-free weekends... hopefully we’ll see you there!

WOMAD: 27 – 30 July (www.womad.co.uk/)

Green Gathering: 3 – 6 Aug (www.greengathering.org.uk/)

Green Man (TBC): 17 – 20 Aug (www.greenman.net/)

Greenbelt: 25 – 28 Aug (www.greenbelt.org.uk/)

Messages of solidarity to political prisoner Lomig written by festival-goers; two children try out our water pistol coconut shie outside the Free Tibet stall at WOMAD 2016.



Fundraising feels great!

At Free Tibet we feel incredibly proud to have such a committed network of passionate supporters. Over the years we've seen plenty of interesting and innovative ways to raise money, some of which are pictured to the right. Fundraising is a fun and rewarding way to contribute to Free Tibet. If you've ever wanted to pursue a hobby, talent, or personal challenge, here is a great way to combine that wish with a cause you feel equally passionate about.

If you are a tea enthusiast like us, why not host your own Tea for Tibet? This is an initiative we launched back in November 2016, putting the kettle on and channelling your inner baker in the name of Tibet. If you're more active, get outdoors and try a sponsored run. In 2015 Karine and Virginie reached the summit of Mount Blanc! The sky really is the limit and no idea is too big or too small.

Don't forget: if you are hoping to set up an online fundraising page, you may be interested in fundraising for our research partner, Tibet Watch. Tibet Watch is based with us in our UK office and provides us with the vital information we need to run our campaigns; without them our work would just not be possible. As Tibet Watch is a certified charity, unlike Free Tibet, it is registered with most online giving pages, so you may want to bear this in mind when thinking about collecting.

Visit www.freetibet.org/fundraise for more inspiration and to download our Fundraising Guide. If you've had your own idea and would like to discuss it further, email Helen on helen@freetibet.org or phone 020 7324 4615. Once you've settled on your idea, we can provide you with fundraising materials and extra resources.

So be bold, be original, and get cracking!
We can't wait to see what you come up with.



From top: Elise and two friends cycle across Estonia; Karine and Virginie reach the summit of Mont Blanc; a supporter completes her Monster Swim; Paul finishes his marathon; Grampian Tibet Support Group finish their sponsored walk; Helena's Tea for Tibet at home.

Year of the Campaign

In 1898 the British politician Joseph Chamberlain noted: “We are living in interesting times.” Over a century later these fabled words have morphed into an understated curse.

So far, 2017 has served up some very “interesting” developments: Donald Trump took ownership of the White House, Turkey’s President – Recep Tayyip Erdoğan – became de facto leader-for-life in his beleaguered nation while in the UK the once proud NHS appears to be limping towards its deathbed.

Yet these worrying developments share something in common: none of them have passed without incident. The US saw one of the biggest mass mobilisations in its history when an estimated 4.2 million people protested against Trump’s inauguration, in mid-April Turkish streets filled with angry voices in defiance of the contested referendum which granted Erdoğan sweeping new powers and London witnessed over quarter of a million nurses, doctors, support staff and members of the general public protesting in support of the much-loved NHS.



It often gets a bad press but demonstrating remains an important campaign tactic for those seeking social justice – and it can be hugely effective.

Occupied by a military force funded by the world's second-largest economy, Tibet has seen a surprising number of protests in 2017 so far. While they may not have stopped China's relentlessly pounding iron fist, Tibetans have effectively loosened its grip by continuing to highlight the irrepressible desire that exists in the country for freedom and self-determination.

Like Trump, who was proven to have blatantly lied about supporter numbers at his swearing-in rally, Chinese authorities have always been keen to trumpet the outlandish numerical benefits of China-driven development in Tibet with boasts about literacy rates and economic miracles. Yet, again like their US counterpart who massively understated the numbers of people who flocked to Washington DC in support of Barack Obama, the figures are misleading and Tibetans are routinely frozen out from positions of genuine power within their own country. When it comes to numbers Tibetans continue to shine in one area in particular and that is in the field of protest, a fact that the Chinese regime would rather ignore.

This spring saw the first Tibetan self-immolation of 2017 when 24-year-old farmer Pema Gyaltzen set himself ablaze in Kardze, eastern Tibet, in mid-March. He survived and was removed by security forces – his location and condition remain unknown.

Heavy duty repression in the town followed, with secretly-filmed video showing uniform-clad police officers in balaclavas brutally beating a handful of people while nearby elderly people cowered in fear.

A few weeks later a man identified as Wangchuk Tseten staged a similar protest in the same region, and in May this was followed by two more self-immolations in Sangchu County and Chentsa County, eastern Tibet.

Despite the widespread controls China exercises in Tibet, one of the world's best-equipped armies is deeply fearful of the visceral power and self-sacrifice expressed through self-immolation protests, and for good reason. There are many different motivations for this unique form of protest but all stem from China's occupation and its ongoing repression in Tibet. One thing remains clear: those who carry out this

form of protest are determined to let the world know what is happening inside Tibet. Despite official condemnation and cover-up, the simple – and devastating – story of someone setting themselves ablaze in the name of freedom echoes across the wires every time it occurs.

Other Tibetans, meanwhile, have chosen to stage one-off actions like waving a forbidden Tibetan national flag or a portrait of the Dalai Lama and have faced harsh punishment for their individual activism. Prison terms ranging between five and fifteen years are not uncommon for 'crimes' of this nature.

Within the globally dispersed Tibetan diaspora protest is also a regularly utilised tactic and at the start of the year multiple actions were staged against an official visit by China's President Xi Jinping to the Swiss capital of Berne. Critics charge that increasing China-Switzerland trade prompted Switzerland's government to effectively ban the protest. Despite this, Tibetan groups carried out a series of colourful demonstrations across the city to the delight of activists, and no doubt to the great annoyance of China's governing elite.

Tibetan protesters meanwhile continued to add their voices to the global cry for freedom on Tibetan Uprising Day on 10 March in cities as diverse as Melbourne, Delhi and Santiago. In London, protesters gathered outside Downing Street before a noisy protest made its way to the Chinese Embassy.

"Putting your body on to the street ... or getting it thrown into a police van," the journalist and activist Paul Mason wrote recently, "creates power of the kind professional politicians despise ... Revolts happen because elites push things so far that large numbers of ordinary people conclude there is no other option but to resist." While the strategies employed by protesters around the world may vary, alongside the severity of the resultant punishment, 2017 is testament to the fact that little people can inspire big change. As the Dalai Lama once put it: "If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito."

2017 has been designated 'Year of the Campaign' by the Tibetan Sikyong (or President) and the Central Tibetan Administration. With protest remaining one of the key methods available to campaigners working against injustice and in support of fairness and equality, it is clear the call has not gone unheeded.

Amid these "interesting times," and the resistance they have generated this year, 2017 may become a date more noted for its power to trump the divisive politics of fear than give in to it. Whether it is on the street, or increasingly through the power of 'sharing,' protests have never been more necessary – or as inspiring.

While strategies may vary, 2017 is testament to the fact that little people can inspire big change.

Destruction continues at Larung Gar

Winter turned to spring in March and the heavy snow and biting winds in Tibet began to clear. But for the residents of Larung Gar the change in weather marked the end of their respite. For them, spring signalled the start of another assault on their community.

The winter of 2016 was particularly harsh for Larung Gar's residents, coming at the end of a year in which at least 3,700 of their fellow residents, students and friends were forced to leave and great swathes of the site were reduced to rubble. But winter also gave the residents a temporary reprieve. The peaceful environment that had allowed them to live and study had been shattered as China forced through its vision of cutting the population of Larung Gar – anywhere between 10,000 to 40,000 people – down to just 5,000 residents. When the Chinese work teams put down their tools and switched the engines of their diggers off in December, it was at least a fleeting return to peace.

The peace lasted until March, when the next announcement came: 3,225 residences had to be torn down by the end of April and not one fewer. Any efforts to obstruct these demolitions or any lack of cooperation by the residents would see the entire site razed to the ground. According to residents, a Chinese work team consisting of around 700 people arrived at the site in order to put the plan into practice.

The Chinese government insists that the demolitions are being carried out to make Larung Gar safer for its residents and to remove fire hazards. The community at Larung Gar always knew this was untrue – those fire hazards included their homes, many of which the residents had built with their own hands. The forceful and insensitive manner of the removals, which even saw monks and nuns locked out of their homes whilst at prayers, provided further proof that the wellbeing of the residents was the last of China's priorities. Insult was repeatedly

added to injury – some evicted residents were promised modest compensation, albeit far below the value of their homes, but did not receive any money at all after being made homeless.

Residents who watched China's plan unfold before their eyes could have no illusions about the Chinese government's intent. The demolitions are part of China's wider plans to exert control over religion in Tibet and a step towards transforming Larung Gar from a living site of study and devotion into a tourist site. The intolerable situation was expressed by one resident, a nun, whose message to the outside world reached Free Tibet: "I don't know how long I will be able to deal [with this]. You need to take action quickly, otherwise [Larung Gar] will become a tourist attraction".

Her fears reflected the wider changes going on not just inside but around Larung Gar. New, concrete structures have risen up among the ruined traditional houses and large, modern hotels are being constructed in Serthar Town, the nearest urban area. Villagers living around Larung Gar have been told that they will soon have to move so that gardens can be laid to beautify the perimeter of the site. A notice from the local tourism authority in April 2017 stated that visits by Chinese tourists were being temporarily limited to only 1,000 per day. Larung Gar's key attractions to non-Buddhist visitors – its beauty, remoteness and tranquillity – could all become casualties of its redevelopment.

This was not what the residents ever wanted. As the nun put it, they simply wanted to live a peaceful life and study truth without disruption, away from pollution and distractions. They never dreamed that their monasteries and homes might be turned into something more in keeping with Disneyland than rural Tibet. Unfortunately, a "strong army" had come from outside, and despite the residents' "protests and tears", they had been unable to stop the destruction. Another resident reacted to the demolitions by saying that they were akin to "destroying heaven".

These are not words that China wants the world to hear. At the same time as attempting



Demolitions continue to make space for new concrete buildings built by Chinese work teams.

“You need to take action quickly, otherwise [Larung Gar] will become a tourist attraction.”

Resident of Larung Gar

to force Larung Gar open for tourism, the authorities have also done their very best to shield the misery that they are causing from international attention. Non-Chinese visitors are banned from getting too close to Larung Gar, with a number of strict checkpoints surrounding the site. Several people have found ways to sneak into or around Larung Gar, including Brice Pedroletti, a journalist with the French newspaper *Le Monde*, and a tourist who managed to enter Larung Gar and take photos of the results of the demolitions. They described an atmosphere in which hundreds of Chinese tourists were able to roam freely throughout the community, while residents were too fearful to stop and talk.

Free Tibet continues to push back against the demolitions and China's attempts to downplay their effects. Our reporting and advocacy, carried out in collaboration with an unprecedented number of Tibet organisations around the world, has brought people onto the streets in large numbers, put Larung Gar on the pages of the mainstream media and prompted government ministers and international bodies to speak out. In November last year, six United Nations experts wrote to China to express their “deep concern” over the demolitions and the wider attacks on Tibetans’ “cultural heritage”. The following month, the European Parliament passed a strong resolution which demanded that China halt the demolitions and forced removals at Larung Gar and respect Tibetans’ religious freedom.

The pressure is mounting and pressure can cause even the most inflexible of regimes to bend. The image of a hollowed-out Larung Gar, run for tourists while the few remaining residents are forced into the shadows, is one vision of the future. The Tibetans and Tibet supporters who have poured their efforts into defending Larung Gar have a brighter vision, one in which the residents can once again live and study in peace. We will continue to give everything we have to make this happen.



The people have spoken and 13,000 of you have signed up to our Beyond Belief campaign, which aims to ensure that Tibetans, not the Chinese government, will decide the future of Buddhism in Tibet. For years, Beijing has been scheming to take over Tibetan Buddhism by trying to marginalise its spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, and take control of its monasteries. The Chinese Communist Party, an avowedly atheist regime, even claims that when the time comes to choose the next Dalai Lama, its party leadership, not the Tibetan people, will make this decision. The Tibetan people will not accept this and neither will we. Since last year, we have encouraged as many of you as possible to add your name to our campaign so that we can take a statement to governments around the world, calling on them to commit to not recognising any Dalai Lama chosen by Beijing, and to insist that only the people of Tibet can determine the future of their religion.

We now want to take this campaign to the next level and build a religious coalition of people from different faiths to help us convey our message to governments. And again, we need your help. We would like you to contact your local faith leaders, from your churches, Buddhist centres, mosques and synagogues, whatever your faith, and tell them about our campaign for religious freedom in Tibet. We would like you to ask them to sign up to our statement, which you can read on our website (www.freetibet.org/belief). Governments around the world pride themselves on their tolerance of religious freedom and will listen if enough people get involved.

If your faith leader wants to get involved, please contact us by email at campaigns@freetibet.org or via phone or post, with their contact details so that we can confirm that they would like their name to appear on our statement. Later this year, we will then take this statement, and the list of names, to governments and ask them to make this firm commitment.

News update...

Self-immolations and crackdowns across Tibet

A series of self-immolations took place across Tibet in spring, with four Tibetans setting themselves on fire in protest against the Chinese occupation. Several of these protests were followed by harsh reprisals from the Chinese authorities.

On 18 March the first self-immolation of 2017 took place when 24-year-old Tibetan farmer Pema Gyaltzen set himself on fire near Tsokha monastery in Kardze, eastern Tibet. Pema survived the protest and was taken away, badly burned, by a group of Chinese police and security personnel, who also arrested an unconfirmed number of Tibetans close to the scene of the protest. After the protest, Pema Gyaltzen's family and friends approached local authorities to enquire about his arrest and wellbeing. They were taken into custody and severely beaten. In the following days there was an escalation in repression across Kardze with the internet cut, surveillance stepped up, and Chinese forces randomly and savagely beating and arresting Tibetans. Many of those arrested have since been released, including all of Pema Gyaltzen's family, but several sustained severe injuries while in detention. Pema Gyaltzen's current whereabouts and condition remain unknown.

A second self-immolation protest took place in Kardze on 15 April. A man identified as Wangchuk Tseten set himself on fire on a busy street in Kardze Town. Chinese police extinguished the blaze and took him away. Since this protest the internet in the surrounding area has been heavily restricted and surveillance has been ramped up. At the time of going to press unconfirmed reports indicated that Wangchuk Tseten had died of his wounds.

On 2 May, 16-year-old student Chakdor Kyab self-immolated in Sangchu County, eastern Tibet. Chakdor Kyab, one of the youngest Tibetans ever to have carried out a self-immolation protest, called for freedom in Tibet and the return of the Dalai Lama as he walked in flames towards the local government office. He collapsed and was taken away by Chinese police. He has since died of his injuries.

Just a few weeks later, on 19 April, a monk named Jamyang Losel self-immolated in Chentsa county, eastern Tibet. Jamyang Losel carried out his fatal protest on the morning of a big music concert that was due to take place. Police and armed forces arrived immediately and took him away. Jamyang was taken to hospital where he died of his injuries.



Pema Gyaltzen.

Series of political prisoners released

Several Tibetan prisoners have been released in recent months, including some of those who took part in mass protests in March 2008. Amchok Phuljung, a musician, was freed in February. He was arrested in August 2012 shortly after the release of his fifth album in which he openly praised the Dalai Lama. Free Tibet pushed for Phuljung's release as part of the Jailed Musicians Campaign. Despite official warnings, his family staged a grand welcome for him upon his return home.

Thinley Tsering, a monk and activist, was released in March after serving a nine-year prison term. He was jailed in March 2008 for sharing images of the Chinese military's brutal crackdown in Ngaba, during which many peaceful protesters were shot dead.

Lobsang Konchok, a monk from Kirti Monastery, was released in March after serving more than five years in prison. He carried out a self-immolation protest in September 2011 alongside fellow monk Lobsang Kalsang. As they set themselves on fire the pair called for a free Tibet and the return of the Dalai Lama. Lobsang Konchok survived the protest but was tortured and had to have his right leg amputated due to the burns he sustained. Following his release, Lobsang Konchok has remained under tight surveillance and he is not permitted to go out, even to his monastery. Fellow protester, Lobsang Kalsang, is reported to have passed away.

52-year-old Tsultrim Gyatso was released on 1 April after a nine-year stint in Miangyang prison. Tsultrim is a monk from Tsenyi Monastery in Amchok Township (Ngaba) and was arrested in 2008 following his involvement in the uprising. Another monk, Lobsang Gyatso, was released on 19 April after spending three years in jail. In April 2014 he staged his protest in the main street of Ngaba County, holding a hand-drawn Tibetan flag and shouting slogans calling for Tibet's freedom and the return of the Dalai Lama.



From top: Phuljung on his release; Thinley Tsering; Lobsang Gyatso on his release.

...News update

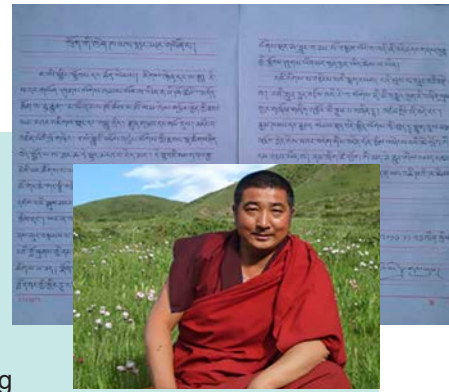
A message of “unshakeable” resilience

In January, a letter written by Buddhist monk and former political prisoner Jigme Guri was passed to Free Tibet. The letter had been written a month after he was released from prison in October 2017, having served a five-year sentence.

A number of conditions have been imposed on Jigme Guri since his release, including travel restrictions, intense surveillance and the monitoring of all his communications.

Despite these draconian controls, his hand-written letter found its way to Free Tibet’s research partner, Tibet Watch. The letter, entitled *Survived Another Threat to Life*, voices a powerful spirit of hope for Tibetans and openly defies China’s authoritarian occupation. In the letter, Jigme Guri refers to the harsh treatment experienced by Tibetans, including himself, who stand up to the Chinese occupation which he says aims to crush both the mind and spirit.

Jigme Guri says “the general public have been fooled ... I can say that [the Chinese authorities] could not have made any changes to my thinking and my innermost promise. On the contrary, for the sake of truth and justice, for the sake of fairness and loyalty, I gained strength, power, courage, patience and much more that I hadn’t gained before ... My thoughts about my people, my love for my country, my hope for my fellow Tibetans are unshakeable like that of a rocky mountain, no one can destroy that.”



Jigme Guri in 2014; his letter.

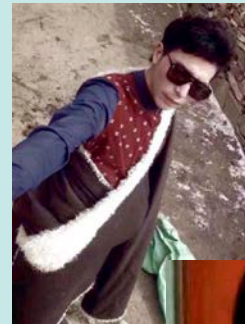
Harsh punishments for solo protesters

Several Tibetans were arrested earlier this year for protests and other acts of resistance. In January, 20-year-old Sonam Tashi was seized by police while carrying out a solo protest in the remote village of Shothal, eastern Tibet, in which he marched down a street shouting “Long live the Dalai Lama” and “Tibet wants freedom”. His family have asked the authorities for details of his whereabouts but have received no response.

In early March a young man named Gendun was arrested after sharing images of the Dalai Lama as well as the Tibetan national flag on the Chinese instant messaging platform WeChat. Following his arrest Gendun was severely beaten. He is now being held in Sershul County prison.

On 16 March Tibetan Monk Lobsang Dhargay carried out a peaceful protest in Ngaba, eastern Tibet, and was arrested within minutes. Lobsang was held at a local army camp, where he was severely beaten. 16 March remains a key date in Ngaba. In 2008 at least 23 people were killed there by Chinese police, and between the years 2011 and 2014 four people self-immolated on this date.

Just two days later in Ngaba, on 18 March 2017, a woman called Dugbey was arrested for a lone protest on a road in Rari Township, known by Tibetans as ‘Martyr Street’. Her whereabouts and condition also remain unknown.



From top: Sonam Tashi; Gendun; Dugbey; Lobsang Dhargay.

International poll on Tibet

How much does the public know about Tibet? Have they even heard of Tibet? How can we get more people involved in the struggle for a free Tibet? Last year we carried out our second crowdfunding initiative to raise funds for an extensive and wide-ranging opinion poll that would help us find out this information.

After smashing our target and expanding the scale of the poll, we carried it out in January with the polling company ComRes. We set up polls in the UK, USA, Canada and Australia, asking questions to 1,000 people

in each country. The questions covered everything from basic knowledge of Tibet through to their concerns about human rights and the role of the media and their own governments. The results were interesting, sometimes fascinating, and will help strengthen our future work. We have included a sample of the results on the back cover and have also written a short report, summarising all of our key findings. If you would like a copy, send us an email at campaigns@freetibet.org or give us a call on 020 7324 4605.

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!

Dear Free Tibet

I would like to ask whether Free Tibet takes a position about whether or not a Westerner sympathetic with the plight of the Tibetan people remaining in Tibet is advised to travel to Tibet or whether it is best not to travel there?

Thank you in advance for your reply and thank you for all you do for the Tibetan people.

The Dalai Lama encourages people to travel to Tibet and tell others about what they have witnessed happening there. There are arguments for and against travelling to Tibet, but if you do choose to go it is important that you are responsible and use a Tibetan-owned agency. The website www.yowangdu.com/tibet_travel.html has very extensive information, and can put you in touch with a Tibetan tour guide.

There is also a page on the Free Tibet website with a few tips on travelling in Tibet and more detail on the arguments for and against visiting Tibet (www.freetibet.org/travel). The tips include simple steps you can take to ensure you do not endanger Tibetans whilst you are there, like avoiding discussion of political topics and how to maximise the benefits of your trip for Tibetans.

If you do decide to travel to Tibet, we'd love to see any photos you take. You can send them to host@freetibet.org if you'd like to share them with us.

Dear Sir/ Madam,

I was wondering if the vigil opposite the Chinese Embassy is still on going. It was on a Wednesday evening between 6.30 and 8.30pm.

Due to un-foreseen circumstances I've been unable to attend, but my situation will be improving soon, so will try to come up again. Long Live Tibet!

Thanks for your email. The vigil is organised by individual supporters, not by Free Tibet, but it does still take place outside the Chinese embassy from 6-8pm every Wednesday. You would be very welcome if you can make it!

All the best,
Free Tibet



From a supporter on 10 March (Tibetan Uprising Day) via Facebook...
Wearing my 'Free Tibet' ribbon proudly on my chest as I do my 'Messenger for Hermes' parcel deliveries today in Devon.

In response to our last magazine (issue 76) we received a beautiful, heartfelt letter from a supporter, some of which is included below.

Dear Editor

Issue 76 of Free Tibet magazine was hard to read; so awful to read how China continues to show not one scintilla of feeling for the peaceful people of Tibet.

The picture on page 8 of Issue 76 with a solitary monk looking down on Larung Gar will stay with me. One can only imagine the serenity of this holy place before: monks living in peace on this glorious high point, living out their days in a pristine landscape.

The Chinese continue with this building of dams, high rise towers and huge highways, and think it is 'progress'. It is not, nor is the mining of lithium for mobile phones. I do not have a mobile phone and after reading the 'Why I Protest' article on page 7 of Issue 76, I will never buy one.

The Tibetan people must be heard loud and clear around the globe and given support globally. Change will Come.



BODHICITTA

Supporter activities

Flying the Tibetan flag

Tibet supporters around the country commemorated Tibetan Uprising Day in March by flying the Tibetan flag in their area. The Tibetan flag has been banned by Chinese authorities in Tibet; flying or even owning a one is illegal. The flag has become a symbol of unity, solidarity and resistance for Tibetans.

In Milton Keynes several flag bearers ran the Tibetan flag around the beautiful Willen Lake. The flag was then raised above the Nipponzan Myohoji Buddhist Temple where there was a ceremony and showing of the film *A Mother's Son* by the Tibetan filmmaker Nawang Anja-Tsang.

The Cardiff Tibet Group flew the Tibetan flag above Caerphilly Castle in South Wales.

In Northampton, the Tibetan flag was raised in March for the 18th consecutive year. Speeches and tributes were made by the Mayor of Northampton and the Dalai Lama's representative in London, Chonpel Tsering.

In Edinburgh a commemorative march was held, which started with poems and speeches on the occupation of Tibet, and then progressed through the city, waving flags and shouting slogans.



From top: Flying the Tibetan flag in Edinburgh, Caerphilly and Milton Keynes.



Year 10 students hold a movie night for Tibet

The year 10 students at Westholme School have raised an amazing £334 for Free Tibet by putting on a film night in their school. Students had been learning about human rights abuses in Tibet in their Religious Studies class, watching videos made by Free Tibet on YouTube and discussing the injustice suffered by Tibetan people. After learning about Tibet, they were keen to help and chose to donate half of the proceeds of their charity movie night to Free Tibet. Thanks to all the students who organised and attended the event!

Summer picnic and meditation

The York Tibet Support Group are hosting their 'Summer Picnic and Meditation for Tibet' on 8 July, at Harewood House near Leeds. They will leave York at 11am, visit the Himalayan garden, have a picnic lunch and then at 3pm hold a meditation for Tibet. People can contact Rowena (rfield151@yahoo.co.uk or 01904 656504) if they would like to attend and either need or could offer transport.

Tweet for Tibet

The Bath Tibet Support Group organised a month of daily action for Larung Gar throughout April. Every day in April at 6:30pm the Bath Tibet Support Group gave two minutes of thought to Larung Gar and then tweeted Chinese authorities, British politicians and various news outlets, calling on them to take action for Larung Gar. People around the country were invited to get involved in their own locations.



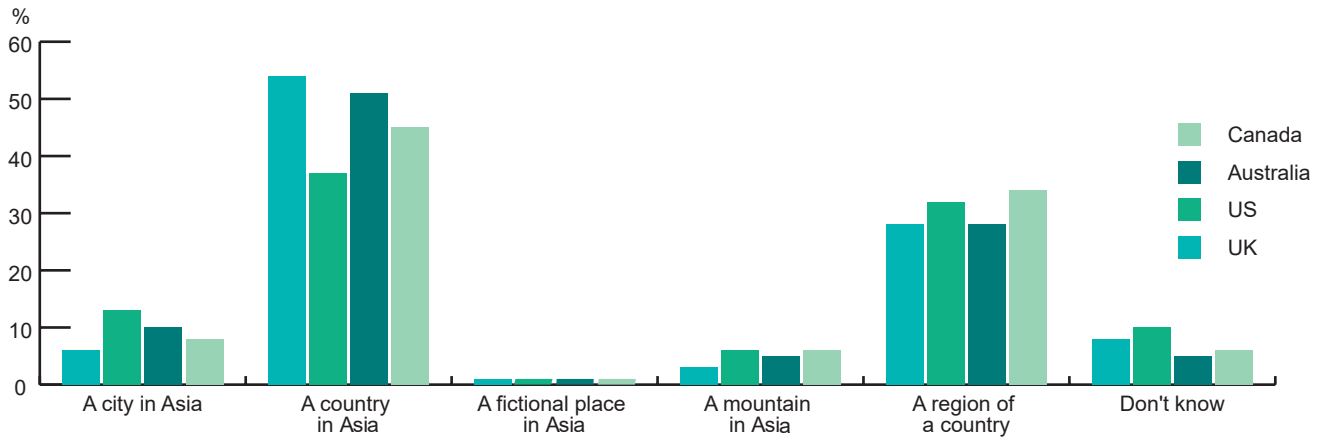
For the latest information on activities by Tibet groups and contact details for the groups themselves, visit our local groups page at www.freetibet.org/localgroups. If you're interested in setting up a group or fundraising for Free Tibet, please get in touch with us at mail@freetibet.org

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

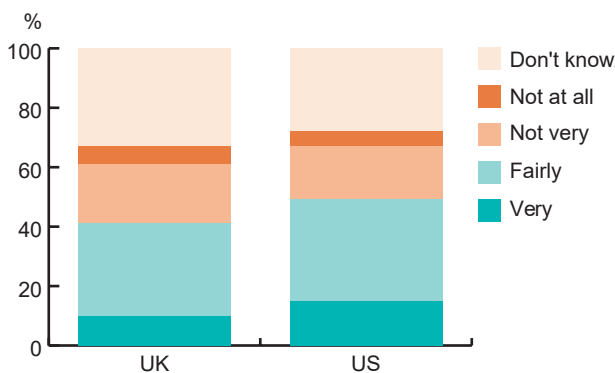
What do people think of Tibet?

Our opinion poll was carried out in January by ComRes. For the poll, we asked 1,000 people in the UK and USA seven questions, and 1,000 people in Australia and Canada three questions. The aim was to assess public knowledge and sympathy for Tibet. Here is a sample of the results:

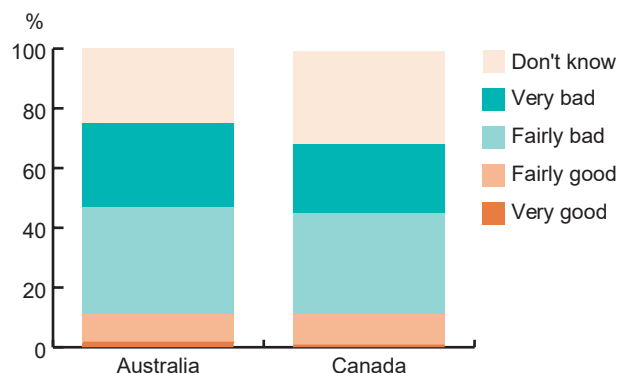
As far as you are aware, what is Tibet?



How concerned, if at all, are you about the situation in Tibet?



And as far as you know, how good or bad do you think the current human rights situation is in Tibet?



Thinking generally, which, of the following conditions do you think it would be worst to live under in a country?

	UK	US	Australia	Canada
Worst	People being arrested and held in prison without being accused of a crime	People being arrested and held in prison without being accused of a crime	People being arrested and held in prison without being accused of a crime	People being arrested and held in prison without being accused of a crime
Second Worst	People being sent to prison for criticising the government	People being sent to prison for criticising the government	Living in a country that is under foreign military occupation	People being sent to prison for criticising the government
Third Worst	People being tortured in prison	People being unable to freely practice their religion	People being sent to prison for criticising the government	People being tortured in prison