

FREE TIBET

Issue 78 October 2017 | issn 1360-4864

www.freetibet.org

free
TIBET



1987 – 2017

• Free Tibet's 30th Anniversary Edition •

“ The basic principles of the UK’s constitution, of the EU’s, of America’s, are based on freedom and justice. So they should stand up for freedom and justice around the world, including in China and Tibet. ”

Lobsang Sangay – Chief Executive of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile



Free Tibet Director
Eleanor Byrne-Rosengren.

Dear friends

The protest that led to the creation of Free Tibet took place in Lhasa on 27 September 1987. I was ten years old. I don’t remember whether I saw the news at the time – but you can read what happened on page 8.

I do remember watching documentaries in the years that followed. It was a different time then. Those documentaries were narrated by A-list celebrities. It’s much harder to get celebrity support these days. Tibet has become much more of a political hot potato and film studios don’t want their top stars being banned from China. It took almost 20 years for China to ‘forgive’ Brad Pitt for *Seven Years In Tibet*.

Seven years after that Lhasa protest I found myself in a language class in London as part of the preparation for a work placement in Kalimpong – a small town in north-east India with a strong Tibetan community. The teacher was explaining the importance of intonation in the Tibetan language. She used the word ‘momo’ as an example. It can either mean delicious dumplings or grandmother, depending on the intonation. I also ended up joining Free Tibet

a couple of years after I returned to the UK. The organisation had become Free Tibet by then. It started life as Tibet Support Group UK and you can read more about our origins on page 8, or in Tibet Watch’s report at www.tibetwatch.org/lhasa1987.

It is incredibly sad that we are still here – that we still need to be here – 30 years on. But it is also amazing that we are. I always knew that joining Free Tibet would be a long-term commitment. As a supporter and, more recently, as Director, I’ve watched Free Tibet grow and develop and continue to recruit new support for Tibet year on year. Thank you for being part of the campaign.

With best wishes,



Contents



4

- 3 **Free Tibet goes mobile!**
Find out what we’ve got up to this summer.
- 4 **In the Dark Campaign**
Our latest campaign on the enforced disappearances in Tibet.



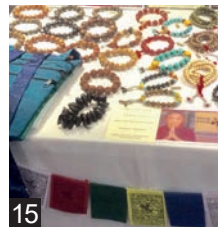
8

- 5 **An interview with Momo Tsering**
Kunkey catches up with Momo Tsering, a Dolls4Tibet employee.
- 8 **A 30-year Journey**
Tibet’s 30th Anniversary year – where are we now?



12

- 10 **Campaigns Update**
Panchen Lama; Beyond Belief; Larung Gar.



15

- 12 **News Update**
Protesters released; Suicide protests in Tibet, self-immolations in India; Landslide buries entire village; UNESCO; Kumbum Monastery.
- 14 **Letters**
- 15 **Supporter Activities**



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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: Champa Tenzin
in the Barkhor, October 1987.
© by John Acklerley,





Free Tibet goes mobile!

Earlier in the year we decided that one of the best ways to celebrate our 30th anniversary would be by doing as much public outreach as possible and trying to recruit as many new Tibet supporters as we could. So we doubled the number of festivals we normally go to and also commissioned a mobile exhibition to help us introduce Tibet to new audiences. The winning design for our mobile exhibition was a series of four wooden gateways which travel around flat-packed and have to be built at each festival site. This has meant that carpentry skills have been almost as important as communication skills for our festival teams!

Our first stop was Buddhafield – a small festival, around 3,000 people, held in Somerset in the middle of July. It was a very early start for our team and a long drive from London but we managed to get everything set up in time for the opening ceremony. We were lucky with the

weather, which meant we had a steady flow of people passing our gazebo and lots of good conversations. We were also invited to give a talk in one of the main marquees while we were there so our Director, Eleanor, spoke about the role and importance of non-violence in Tibet's resistance to China's repression. It was a topic that went down well with the Buddhafield crowd and there were so many questions afterwards that our session overran by half an hour.

Our next stop was WOMAD – the World of Music and Dance, which takes place just outside Malmesbury in Wiltshire. This festival gave us the opportunity to introduce Tibet to a much bigger crowd of people – around 45,000 on average. The opinion poll which we carried out earlier this year showed us that

people don't need to hear much about Tibet in order to understand that they should be very concerned about the human rights situation there – but that there are lots of people who have never heard Tibet's story and some who don't even know that it's a country. Larger festivals like WOMAD give us the chance to share Tibet's story with a whole new audience and our exhibition acts like an extra team, one which keeps on telling the story day and night.

After WOMAD we went on to the Green Gathering – another small festival, with around 5,000 people, which takes place in Monmouthshire, just across the Welsh border. Sadly, we spent the first 36 hours hiding from the storm which battered the festival's rather unprotected hilltop location. Once the skies cleared and the winds died down, we started constructing our exhibition. Eleanor and John, our Campaigns Manager, also led a small discussion circle on Tibetan resistance.

After the Green Gathering it was back to London for our annual Summer Shindig. This is a joint event with our partner, Tibet Watch. Once again, we had a great crowd, many of whom were attending for the first time. We showed a series of short films – all on the theme of 'food' – made by Tibetans for the 2016 Tibet Film Festival. As always, we had some delicious momos and Tibetan music. We also launched our new campaign, 'In The Dark', which aims to put a spotlight on forced disappearances and help find Tibet's hidden prisoners.

Our final event of the summer was the Greenbelt festival – a gathering just outside Kettering which drew about 10,000 people. Greenbelt has a Christian ethos so it was a perfect place to recruit new support for our religious freedom campaign. Our team also had incredible weather – a fantastic way to end a tiring but productive tour.

Clockwise from top left: WOMAD; Buddhafield; Big Green Gathering; Buddhafield; Greenbelt.



In August, Free Tibet launched its latest campaign, In The Dark. The aim of the campaign is to raise awareness of enforced disappearances, a practice in which Tibetans are abducted by the occupying Chinese security forces and held in a secret location, cut off from the outside world, where they are at risk of torture. Using the personal stories of Tibetans who have been snatched by the state, Free Tibet hopes to encourage supporters to push back against this practice and to put pressure on China to release Tibet's hidden political prisoners.

There are an estimated six million people in Tibet today. Each one of them has their own story and each of these stories has been affected by the military occupation that Tibetans are forced to live under. Two of these stories capture why this campaign is so necessary.

The first begins in January 2016, when hundreds of Tibetans gathered at Chokri Monastery in Kardze, eastern Tibet. The crowd, a mix of monks and laypeople, had assembled to pray and send good wishes to the Dalai Lama, who was undergoing treatment in hospital in America. Some people in the crowd waved portraits of the Dalai Lama, others called for his long life – and in doing so, all of them were breaking the law. Under the Chinese occupation, where monasteries are kept under heavy surveillance and the Dalai Lama is persona non grata, a “terrorist” in the eyes of the Chinese Communist Party, these displays of loyalty to the Dalai Lama are treated as state security crimes. Reprisals followed days later, when Pagah, an abbot at Chokri Monastery, and Orgyen, a senior monk, were taken away and detained. They have not been heard from since.

Months later, Jamyang Lodru, a monk from Tsenang Monastery in Tibet's eastern Ngaba County, was grabbed by police in Barkam city. Witnesses recall police appearing and violently restraining him, covering his head, cuffing his hands and dragging him into a police vehicle. Attempts by Jamyang Lodru's family to get information about why he was arrested, where he was being held and even confirmation about his well-being fell on deaf ears. Jamyang Lodru effectively vanished for a year only reappearing momentarily in 2017 for a trial in which he was sentenced to three years in prison. Like Pagah and Orgyen, he has also not been heard from since.

Both of these stories end abruptly because both took place under a Chinese occupation that has ways of removing people from their everyday lives, of making them disappear. It is a process that countless Tibetans have gone through: being swiftly and brutally arrested, then held alone in detention and ruthlessly interrogated, even tortured. Some of them might be charged and put on trial in secret, then handed a long prison sentence. From their arrest to their eventual release, years later, they can vanish with little or no trace. The methods China uses to make people disappear have cut daughters and sons off from their parents, monks from their monasteries, leaders from their communities. The aim is to crush dissent and to take hope away from those who would resist the occupation.

The places where Tibetans are held are among the most secretive and repressive locations in all of Tibet. They are spread out across the country, a spiderweb of detention

IN THE DARK

centres and prisons where Tibetans who have fallen foul of the occupation are held. In these buildings, shielded from public scrutiny, Tibetans risk torture and sometimes even death. Tenzin Namgyal, a former prisoner, remembers the taunts of his jailers and torturers, who believed they could do whatever they wanted. “They said that however many people like me they killed, nobody would ever find out”, he recalls.

Free Tibet and our research partner, Tibet Watch, refuse to let these places remain hidden. We have worked hard to document the locations of these prisons and the abuses experienced by the people inside. Thanks to our efforts, bodies such as the United Nations recognise that torture and abuse are widespread under the occupation and have directly confronted the Chinese government about it.

Among those most responsible for bringing China’s regime of torture to light are former political prisoners and detainees who have since fled Tibet and reached the outside world, where they finally have the freedom to share their experiences. People like Golog Jigme, a monk who was repeatedly detained and tortured before he successfully escaped Tibet in 2014. He has since become one of the most vocal Tibetan voices against torture.

From the efforts of such brave people, we know what goes on inside these prisons. We have heard from former prisoners about the beatings they have received from guards, about being denied food and being forced to drink their water from the prison latrines. They have told us about their interrogations, punishments, torture and mock executions, in which prison guards will hold a gun to the back of their heads. We have heard about how prisoners are denied visits from family members, access to lawyers or medical treatment. Some Tibetan prisoners, such as Tenzin Delek Rinpoche, have even died in prison because they did not receive basic medical treatment that could have saved their lives.

There are many prisoners in Tibet, but we have chosen six stories for our campaign, each indicative of the cruelty of the occupation. These stories are harrowing to read but we feel they need to be told so that they can inspire people to take action. Some of them are characterised by extraordinary bravery, such as Sonam Lhatso, who has so far spent nine years in prison after she and her fellow nuns protested against restrictions that were imposed on her nunnery. Her fellow nuns have attempted to find out where she is, but they have been blocked at every turn. Meanwhile, the story of Thardhod

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Gyaltsen, arrested in 2013, demonstrates some of the cruel absurdity that Tibetans are forced to endure. A senior monk from Drongna monastery in Driru county, Thardhod Gyaltsen was arrested in December 2013 when Chinese security forces stormed his monastery. The security forces are alleged to have caught him storing images and recordings of the Dalai Lama. The idea that a Tibetan monastery might contain images of the highest and most venerated individual in Tibetan Buddhism might seem perfectly reasonable, but the occupation is nothing if not unreasonable and, just over a month later, Thardhod Gyaltsen found himself in court, where he was sentenced to 18 years in prison.

At Free Tibet we have found that when we explain the stories of these prisoners, people feel compelled to act. When we conducted our public opinion poll earlier this year, we asked members of the public in the UK, USA, Australia and Canada about which human rights abuses concerned them the most. In all four countries, a clear majority of people told us that people being arrested and held in prison without being accused of a recognised crime was their main concern. The injustice of these cases resonates with the public and can generate real pressure on China – a superpower, but one that works

hard to protect its image from international criticism.

We named our campaign In The Dark because its name evokes the isolation of Tibetan prisoners who are denied their freedom and who run the risk of torture and other forms of abuse. It also describes the fears of those outside the prison walls: the families, friends and communities who may not know why their husband, mother, sister or son has not come home, who don't understand why they are denied any information and who are left to worry and speculate about what has happened.

The Chinese regime in Tibet regularly attempts to impose itself on Tibetans by showing its strength and trying to dictate almost every aspect of Tibetans' daily lives. However, it also displays its weakness by trying to dodge scrutiny and hide its crimes behind the thick walls and locked doors of its prisons. We will not allow this to happen. The darkness is a powerful tool for the Chinese occupation, an instrument of fear and oppression, but it is not impenetrable. By shining a light on these cases, Free Tibet and our supporters can push the authorities to reveal the location of these prisoners, improve their conditions and possibly even help bring about their release.



Action

To read all six cases from our In The Dark campaign, learn more about China's network of prisons across Tibet and get involved in the campaign, visit: www.freetibet.org/dark.

Donate

You can give to the campaign at www.freetibet.org/inthedarkdonate.

From top: Golog Jigme; Jamyang Lodru; Lobsang Gendun; Sonam Lhatso; Tenzin Delek Rinpoche; Khenpo Pagah; Thardhod Gyaltsen; Geshe Orgyen; Wangdue.

An interview with Momo Tsering

Kunkey is our Project Officer working with the Tibet Watch team in Dharamsala. Many of the suppliers to our online ethical trade shop are also based in Dharamsala, working with the Tibetan refugee community there.

One such supplier is Dolls4Tibet and recently Kunkey sat down to talk with Momo Tsering, a Dolls4Tibet employee, to ask her about herself and her thoughts on the current situation in Tibet. Momo Tsering's full name is Tsering Dolker, but everyone addresses her as Momo Tsering (Momo meaning grandma). Her parents were from Shingtase, a southern region of Tibet, and she was born in Gangtok in India.

Kunkey: Tell me a bit about your parents' decision to leave Shigatse. How long have you been living in Gangtok?

Momo Tsering: I can't remember when my parents fled Tibet, but we reached the south of India when I was around 14 years old. I'm from Hunsur settlement. (Hunsur settlement is located in Hunsur Taluk in Karnataka State, south India, about 60 km west of Mysore City). My birth animal is Tiger, which means I'm now either 58 or 59 years old.

K: How have you found life here? How are your family?

MT: My family are well and comfortable, so all is good. I have two sons. Both are married now.

K: What are your thoughts on the current situation in Tibet?

MT: I try not to think about it too much. Most of my time is spent working, both here and at home - I like to keep myself busy. People come and go from the workshop. At home, we focus on our lives in Gangtok, our attention is here. The only thing I think about is that once the children are fully settled and able to look after themselves, I would like to visit Tibet once more.

TK: What do your children think of that dream of yours?

MT: It is my private wish, the children are busy working and living their lives. It's in my thoughts alone.

TK: So what work do you do with Dolls4Tibet?

MT: I make the angels here.



TK: What do you like to do when you're not working here?

MT: I only work! Day and night. My family tells me off, they say I work too hard and don't relax, it's their only criticism of me. I prefer to work in the workshop. Here I can work as much as I want but at home everyone's always chiding me. I am much happier whilst working; both in the workshop and at home, weeding, ploughing the garden or making bricks.

Dolls4Tibet was created by Mona and Karma Sichoe. It employs Tibetan refugee women who are unskilled or otherwise marginalised, to create unique Tibetan handicrafts reflecting their own rich culture. Dolls4Tibet provides a supportive training and work environment for the most vulnerable women in the Tibetan refugee community. The motivation to create culturally relevant handicrafts came from the couple's deep commitment to the Tibetan cause.

Currently, we stock a range of Dolls4Tibet products in our online shop, including their very popular mini monks! Have a look yourself and check out some of our other suppliers under our 'Meet the Suppliers' section at www.freetibet.org/shop.

A 30-year Journey



On 27 September 1987 a group of 21 monks from Drepung Monastery in Lhasa gathered very early in the morning. They didn't want to attract any attention until they were ready. At around 9am they started walking around the Barkhor, the public area around the Jokhang Temple, carrying a hand drawn Tibetan national flag and shouting slogans. Some of the people who saw them go past were afraid and tearfully begged them to stop and run away before they were arrested. Others were braver and joined them. In the end, all the monks and five members of the public were arrested.

Four days later, a group of 23 monks from Lhasa's Sera Monastery carried out a second protest. Alongside the calls for Tibet's freedom, they demanded that the Drepung monks who had protested earlier should be released. The

group from Sera Monastery were joined by monks from the Jokhang Temple and also from Nechung Monastery. Then around 50 lay people joined the protest and the crowd grew even larger as they made circuits around the Barkhor. By the fourth circuit, police came to break up the protest. The monks and around 30 lay people were arrested and taken to the police station in the Jokhang square. A crowd of 2-3,000 people gathered outside, demanding the release of those who had been arrested. It was chaotic. Women and children threw rocks at the police while the crowd overturned police vehicles and set fire to them. The police station was also set on fire and some young monks led by Champa Tenzin, a monk in his forties from the Jokhang, seized the opportunity to run into the compound. After ten minutes, Champa Tenzin emerged from

Above: Champa Tenzin in the Barkhor on 1 October 1987. Photo taken by John Acklerley, who remains on the board of International Campaign for Tibet

Getting information out of Tibet is harder than ever... Few people understand the challenges we face or the bravery of the Tibetans we work with.

the side of the building with badly burned arms and a number of the arrested monks following after him. Three were shot dead as they ran into the crowd but many escaped. Champa Tenzin, hailed as a hero, was carried by the crowd around the Barkhor.

The events of those days kickstarted almost a year and a half of protest, which ended only with the imposition of martial law. They also led to the creation of Free Tibet.

There were a number of foreigners in Lhasa when the protests started and they were instrumental in smuggling out photographs and information. The protests of the 80s were the biggest and strongest acts of resistance since the 1959 uprising and they were widely reported by the international media. People were shocked by China's heavy-handed response and a small group of people in London felt compelled to take action.

Shortly after news of the protests broke, a public meeting was called by Lord Avebury, who was then a Liberal Democrat peer, to discuss the situation in Tibet and figure out what could be done. One suggestion which was made was the establishment of a membership organisation which could be used to put pressure on the British government. In the end, a core group of around 12-15 people emerged and they continued to meet wherever and whenever they could.

The group believed that they could best help Tibet by seeking to change public opinion rather than talking to politicians. So they set out to raise awareness and build grassroots support. This was a different approach to the one being taken by Tibet Society, which was established shortly after the Dalai Lama went into exile in 1959 and focused mainly on working with politicians and parliamentarians.

With the aims established, the group then set about getting a lawyer to write a constitution, hiring a Director, producing leaflets and writing to people asking them to support the campaign. The name being used at that time was Tibet Support Group UK.

Today, 30 years on, we are known as Free Tibet but we still have the same aims. We work to raise awareness about Tibet with each new generation and continue to pressure governments and institutions through supporter action. That pressure continues to make a difference.

Firstly, we know that campaigns for individual political prisoners rarely lead directly to release but do have a huge impact on prison conditions. It can mean a cessation of torture, better food, access to a lawyer or doctor, a family visit – and these things can be life-changing, even life-saving, for the individual concerned.

Secondly, we hear from Tibetans in exile that the solidarity matters. Tibet rarely gets the support it needs and deserves from governments but knowing that they do have the support of international civil society and individual people around the world is a source of great strength and encouragement to many Tibetans.

Thirdly, and finally, we know that one day there will be an opportunity for freedom in Tibet. China is strong but not quite as strong as it would have us all believe and the evidence of history is that no regime lasts forever. If we succeed in keeping Tibet in the public consciousness then there will be a reserve of support for Tibetans to tap into when the day comes.

The world has changed since 1987. Getting information out of Tibet is harder than ever and a photograph in a newspaper has less impact. Images of protests, state violence and even torture are, sadly, commonplace. Moreover, the advent of the internet and social media have given people constant and immediate access to information about everything happening everywhere in the world. Few people understand the challenges we face or the bravery of the Tibetans we work with. But that's why it's so important to keep doing what we do – to keep telling Tibet's story and building more support. We intend to keep working as long as Tibet needs us but we can't do it without you. On this 30th anniversary, let's acknowledge the challenges and the distance we still have to go but also celebrate the victories along the way and the fact that we are able to make a difference. Most importantly, let's recommit to the cause and remind ourselves that one day Tibet will be free.

On 27 September 2017, the 30th anniversary of the first protest, Tibet Watch released a report presenting previously unpublished photographs and outlining the international response to the protests and the Chinese crackdown. You can find out more at www.tibetwatch.org/lhasa1987.

Campaigns update...

Free Tibet supporters responded in their droves to our Free the Panchen Lama campaign, helping us gather over 700 cards, postcards and messages wishing Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the Panchen Lama, a happy birthday and sending him support. These cards show the Chinese government that the world refuses to forget about the Panchen Lama, just as Tibetans refuse to give up their call for his release.

The cards have now been delivered to China's United Front Work Department, the government body that we believe has contact with the Panchen Lama and his family, who have been missing since their abduction in 1995. Since the Chinese authorities insist that the Panchen Lama is safe and happy, we also enclosed a letter in Chinese requesting that these cards are handed over to him.

We continue to push for China to reveal Gedhun Choekyi Nyima's location. We have urged the British Foreign Office to put pressure on China and even given them their own letter for the Panchen Lama, which they handed over at a meeting with their Chinese counterparts in June.



FREE THE PANCHEN LAMA

Action

Online supporters can send a letter to the Chinese Minister of Justice, asking them to either release the Panchen Lama or provide proof that he is already free and safe.

You can find the action on our website here: www.freetibet.org/free-panchen-lama

Beyond Belief

In spring we took our Beyond Belief campaign to the next level and began to build a coalition of people from different faiths to tell China to stop interfering with religion in Tibet. We have been asking supporters to contact their local faith leaders to ask them to sign up to our statement on religious freedom and

lots of you have already responded. Local faith leaders from Buddhist centres, mosques, churches and synagogues have all signed up to the joint statement, which we plan to take to governments around the world to encourage them to press China to stop its political interference in Tibetan Buddhism.

The Beyond Belief campaign has had an overwhelmingly positive response at the summer festivals that Free Tibet has attended this year, with many members of the public learning for the first time about the Chinese government's religious repression. It has also been very popular with supporters, with over 13,000 people signing up to our petition so far. The campaign was launched last summer in response to Beijing's plans to take control of Tibetan Buddhism by trying to marginalise its spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, and take over 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.

To see the statement and learn more about the campaign, visit our website here: www.freetibet.org/belief.



Save Larung Gar

Our Save Larung Gar campaign continues to put international pressure on China to halt evictions and demolitions at the Larung Gar Academy, the most important Tibetan Buddhist centre in the world. In June, the European Union directly challenged China over its demolition programme.

The condemnation came at the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue on 22 June, at a face to face meeting between European and Chinese representatives. The EU representatives stated that the EU was “highly concerned” about several issues in Tibet, among them the demolitions and evictions at Larung Gar. The EU also expressed concern about the “grave human rights situation in Tibet” and urged China to resume dialogue with representatives of the Dalai Lama.

Free Tibet had been pressing the EU since January to put pressure on China to halt the demolitions. Letters from the Free Tibet office and our supporters were sent to Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and Donald Tusk, President of the European Council, urging them to prioritise Larung Gar in meetings with China.

Larung Gar Buddhist Academy has been the scene of a wave of demolitions and forced evictions of its residents since July 2016, when Chinese work teams began implementing a plan to cut down its population, estimated among different sources as anywhere between 10,000 and 40,000 residents. The aim has been to reduce the



academy population down to 5,000 people by October 2017. Our latest information states that since 2016 some 4,830 people have been evicted and 4,725 residences of monks and nuns have been demolished.

Since the campaign started last year, there have been strong statements calling for the demolitions and removals to be stopped from the US State Department, the US Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, the United Nations and the European Parliament.

The campaign is still running and we encourage any supporters who have not already done so to add their name to our action targeting the United Front Work Department, the Chinese body that oversees the evictions and demolitions at every stage. You can find the campaign on our website here: www.freetibet.org/urgent-action-larung-gar-buddhist-academy. You can also send an email or write a letter to the Chinese Embassy in your country telling them to halt the demolitions. See our website for details, or contact us for assistance at 020 7324 4605.

Legacies : a lasting gift for Tibet

In the 30 years since Free Tibet was founded, the way not-for-profit organisations support themselves has shifted dramatically. Recent years have seen a huge jump in legacy giving (people leaving gifts in their wills) and recently Free Tibet received our biggest ever legacy gift – over £50k.

Writing and amending your will can be hassle-free and relatively cheap. If you would like to receive further information about leaving a gift to Free Tibet in your will, contact Josey on josey@freetibet.org, 020 7324 4610, or at Free Tibet, 28 Charles Square, London, N1 6HT.

1987

2017

News update...

Protesters released

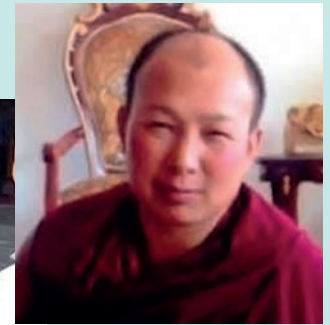
Over the past few months Free Tibet has reported the release of several Tibetan political prisoners.

On 10 July Kalsang Yarphe, a Tibetan musician, was released after spending four years in prison. In the summer of 2013 he was arrested from Lhasa and taken to Chengdu for singing politically themed songs with fellow Tibetan musicians. A year earlier he had organised a concert, called “Khawai Metok” (Snow Flower), which encouraged Tibetans to speak and write in their native language. The DVD of the concert was widely distributed across Tibet shortly before the Chinese government banned it.

At the end of July Lobsang Kalsang, a self-immolation protester, was released. In 2011 Lobsang Kalsang set himself on fire while shouting slogans calling for the long life of the Dalai Lama and for Tibet’s independence.

Gomar Choepel was also released in July. He had been imprisoned in 2015 for possessing pictures of the Dalai Lama. While in prison, he was held incommunicado and had to work 15 hours a day.

In August, Adruk Lopoe, a monk who spent 10 years in prison, was freed from Mianyang Prison in Sichuan Province. Adruk Lopoe was arrested in 2007 for protesting against the detention of his uncle, Runggye Adak. On 20 November 2007, he was sentenced to 10 years in prison for separatist activities and leaking state secrets.



From top left:
Kalsang Yarphe on his release;
Gomar Choepel;
Lobsang Kalsang.

Suicide protest in Tibet, self-immolations in India

In June, an unidentified Tibetan man died after slitting his own throat near the Jokhang Temple in Lhasa. Before he took his own life, the man shouted: “We don’t have freedom and rights”. He also called for “Freedom in Tibet”.

This event was followed in July by two separate self-immolation protests carried out by exiled-Tibetans in north India.

The first, Tenzin Choeying, was a 19-year-old student studying at the Central University for Tibetan Studies in Bihar State. According to eyewitnesses, the young man set himself on fire after coming out of a hall of residence. He then ran about 20 steps shouting “Bod Gyalo, Bod Gyalo (Victory to Tibet, Victory to Tibet)” before falling to the ground. He was taken to hospital but died eight days later.

The second incident took place in Dharamsala where, according to multiple witnesses, Passang Dhondup, a 49-year-old wood painter, shouted “Long live His Holiness the Dalai Lama” as he burnt.



Tenzin Choeying.

Landslide buries entire village

After days of torrential rain, Xinmo Village in Maowun County was hit by a landslide on Saturday 24 June at around 6 am (local time). According to Chinese official news, about eight million cubic meters of hillside descended on the village. Over 40 houses were buried as a result of the landslide. The landslide also blocked river channels, leading to floods that then submerged the lower part of the village, flooding 46 homes.

Free Tibet obtained video footage of the disaster’s impact as well as testimony from a local resident who criticised the authorities’ ill-equipped rescue teams.



Rescue team, Maowun County.

...News update

Tibetan land to be heritage site in controversial UNESCO move

On 7 July the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) announced that it had added Kokoxili in Tibet to its World Heritage list. This decision was taken despite objections from Tibetans and Tibet supporters.

There are fears that this decision could give China an excuse to expel Tibetan nomads and their cattle in the name of conservation. China has used this excuse in the past to eject nomads despite these groups living on the land legitimately for centuries.

Between 2006 and 2014, 2.3 million rural Tibetans and nomads were transferred from their land into urban settlements. Investigations since then have found that nomads have struggled to make the transition from self-sufficient farming to living and working in an urban environment. With no means of gaining employment and facing rising costs, nomads have been forced to sell off their livestock to avoid accumulating unmanageable debts.



Tibetan nomads.

Plans to ‘re-brand’ Kumbum Monastery

Local Tibetans and monks have voiced strong opposition to the Chinese authorities’ latest plans to convert Kumbum Monastery into a tourist spot. The proposals would see the holy site in Rushar County, Qinghai Province, turned into a public museum and tourist destination, according to local reports.

A committee of monks and local Tibetans has been formed to protect Kumbum Monastery, which has over 600 years of history. They have already written a nine-point petition to the local authorities, urging them to listen to the will of the people by maintaining and preserving the monastery and its relics rather than pursuing business prospects.

Free Tibet has regularly raised concerns about the commercialisation of Tibet’s monasteries and heritage, which appears to be an increasing trend. Some Tibetan monasteries have been renovated to make them friendlier for tourists while resident monks have reported large groups of tourists coming to their monasteries on a daily basis, disturbing their studies and way of life.

In recent years, residents of Kumbum Monastery have also had to deal with the attention of the Chinese army. Hundreds of police and soldiers were stationed outside the monastery in February during Monlam Chenmo, a key Buddhist festival. In 2015, during a similar show of strength by the army, one Tibetan at Kumbum Monastery said: “I was so afraid that I forgot to pray”. Another wondered whether they were “supposed to watch the army or watch the prayer festival”.



Protesters at Kumbum Monastery, July 2017.

Letters



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!

Hello, Free Tibet.

Could you tell me why China does not let the Tibetan people emigrate? I don't understand why they would make such a point of enforcing this for Tibetans. Thanks in advance. With love & prayers, Brigitte

Although there have been cases of Tibetans being allowed to leave Tibet, for most Tibetans the border is shut, with nobody getting in or out without the say of the Chinese occupation. Border security has increased in recent years, leading to a huge drop in Tibetans reaching refuge in neighbouring countries like India. The most likely reason that Tibetans cannot leave is that they are first hand witnesses to a military occupation and China's human rights abuses. Just as China heavily restricts Tibetans' communications with the outside world, so it wants to prevent Tibetans from telling others about the harsh conditions that they live under. Despite these restrictions, some Tibetans do still manage to escape and are a key source of information about life in Tibet.

I don't suppose writing to the Chinese embassy would help? From Carol Marshall on Twitter.

It can definitely help. In our campaigns we often encourage those concerned by human rights abuses in Tibet to put pressure on China via the embassy, as well as writing to the authorities in China and raising awareness among friends and on social media. Writing to the embassy contributes to the international pressure on the Chinese government by showing them that people around the world is paying attention to what goes on in Tibet.

I met some of your folk at the Greenbelt festival a few weeks ago and spent some time speaking with a young lady about the petitions. I didn't sign the petitions there as I wanted to do it online and pass on the details to some friends. However, I cannot recall exactly which ones they were, and there seem to be numerous on your website. I wonder whether you might talk to one of the team who went to Greenbelt and get them to email back with a couple of direct links. Thank you for your time and help. David Cole

Thanks for getting in touch. It was a pleasure to meet you at Greenbelt and it's always very encouraging when people we meet at festivals actually follow up on campaigns. We do have a lot on our website and I can certainly provide a few direct links.

This is an information page about the Beyond Belief campaign: www.freetibet.org/religious-freedom
This is the petition page: www.freetibet.org/petitions/3487
This is the page which explains that we are trying to build an interfaith coalition and contains the text of the statement that we would like religious leaders to sign up to: www.freetibet.org/belief

Also, it may be worth noting that we are using the phrase 'religious leaders' to include ministers, vicars, priests – anyone who leads a congregation or any kind of faith group. It's not limited to people in senior positions.

Thank you once again for your support and your interest in Tibet.

My football club (Liverpool) has just signed a deal with a Chinese water supplier. I am worried that this company may be exploiting the Tibetan people and extracting our natural resources to sell on in plastic bottles. What can I do? Who should I contact? Jackie Stewart

Thanks for your letter. Free Tibet has received several emails from Liverpool fans expressing their concerns about the deal signed between Liverpool FC and Tibet Water Resources Limited (TWRL) in August, which made TWRL Liverpool FC's "Official Regional Water Partner in China".

We share your worry about this deal, and have in fact been campaigning against companies that invest in TWRL since last summer, due to our concerns that TWRL is operating in Tibet and talking its natural resources under the context of a military occupation.

We have written to Liverpool FC's board of directors to tell them about the negative effects of this deal. We have also reached out to Liverpool fans, many of whom have themselves written to the club. We hope that Liverpool FC's directors will terminate this deal, but, should they push ahead with it, we will continue to work with Tibet and Liverpool supporters to try and change their minds. In the meantime, you can contact the club's Directors via their website or tweet @LFC to let them know you don't support this deal.

Supporter activities

Free Tibet Summer Shindig

We were pleased to welcome many supporters to our annual Free Tibet Summer Shindig back in August. The event showcased Tibetan culture, Tibetan culinary art and Tibetan activism, including a unique series of short films made by Tibetans for the Tibet Film Festival.

The evening was a fantastic success, and Hackney Showrooms provided an excellent place to show case our new mobile exhibition, which has made its way around the country this summer as part of our 30th Anniversary year. Many supporters praised the interactive and visual way it portrayed the Tibetan resistance movement and Tibet today. If you'd like to see it for yourself why not join us for our 30th Anniversary event in October?

Events like these are really important for getting Tibet supporters together and it was great to see such a positive response. Tibetans continue to find creative ways of expressing their national identity and love of their homeland, and it was lovely to see so many of you showing your support.

Craft Fair for Free Tibet

Leslie Stanley has been doing a fantastic job selling Tibetan jewellery and other items on his craft stall. The items come from Nepal, India and some are made by Tibetan refugees. Leslie has kindly decided to donate all the profits (so far £250!) to Free Tibet and hopes to continue selling his popular jewellery and raising money for the Tibetan cause. Thank you Leslie!

VitaZen Sound Bath

VitaZen, a yoga studio in Virginia USA, have raised \$316 (£245) for Free Tibet at their recent Tibetan Singing Bowl Sound Bath! Sound Baths are meditative events, where various instruments such as Tibetan Singing Bowls are played. These therapeutic instruments have certain vibratory frequencies which aim to help you achieve a clear and peaceful state of mind. We're grateful to VitaZen and hope they continue to run many more successful events like this one.

Refugee Week – Tibet Support Group York

As part of Refugee Week in May, Tibet Support Group York showed extracts from the film Drensol ('memory' – in Tibetan) featuring Tibetan elders describing their experiences in Tibet and living as refugees in India. This was followed by personal stories from group members who had met Tibetan refugees while visiting a Tibetan refugee settlement in Northern India. It was an absorbing and moving evening and many of the people there joined in the discussion that followed.

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) supporters: Roger Taylor and Jacob Winn.



From top: Summer Shindig in London; Leslie's craft stall; Sound Bath.

Ethical Christmas Gifts

Browse our catalogue or visit
www.freetibet.org/shop

