

# FREE TIBET



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TIBETANS  
DEMAND  
FREEDOM

SAVE



# CEO LETTER



Dear friends,

At the time of writing, it is a cold, dark December evening and I am looking back one final time at the year that has just passed.

For Free Tibet, it was one of our most successful in recent memory. Pages 8 and 9 are dedicated to how we, with your support, made a difference for Tibet, from sharing testimonies of Tibetan refugees with the world to releasing groundbreaking reports and stringing together a series of campaign victories. So much is going on at Free Tibet that we even decided to expand the magazine to 20 pages to bring you more articles, more news from Tibet and more products - many at reduced prices - from our Free Tibet shop.

How inevitable then, that having drafted and painstakingly proofread our bigger and better magazine, events outpaced us. In mid December, a debate took place in parliament, dedicated to Tibet, in which MPs shared evidence of religious repression that Tibetans face. A year that had begun with us unveiling a report on China's attacks on Tibetan Buddhism ended with MPs confronting the UK government and demanding that it do more on Tibet. It felt like a breakthrough moment.

The American writer Hal Borland wrote that "Year's end is neither an end nor a beginning but a going on". We are not aiming for a new beginning in 2024, but to bring the momentum we gathered in 2023 into the new year and to hit new heights. We have no illusions about how much work lies ahead, but we also know you will be with us all the way. With your support, I have no doubt 2024 can be another year in which we make a difference for Tibet.

Thank you,

John Jones, Head of Campaigns, Policy and Research

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Front cover: Yignyen leads protest chants on Resist the CCP Day.



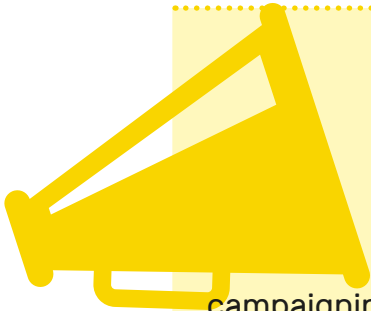
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Our vision is a free Tibet in which Tibetans are able to determine their own future and the human rights of all are respected. Free Tibet campaigns for an end to China's occupation of Tibet and for international recognition of Tibetans' right to freedom. We mobilise active support for the Tibetan cause, champion human rights and challenge those whose actions help sustain the occupation.

# 2023 IN NUMBERS



**10**  
**PROTESTS**

campaigning for Tibetan freedom outside the Chinese embassy

**10**  
**REFUGEE TESTIMONIES**

recorded by our researchers at Tibet Watch



**2,592**  
**EMAILS**

sent to demand the release of Lhundrub Drakpa

**£32,762**

raised for our research team during  
Tibet Match 2023



**75,482**  
**SIGNATURES**

collected for petitions to remove Hikvision cameras,  
end DNA abuse, and Protect Tibet's Children



Protesters opposite the Chinese embassy on 1 October.



## TEACHING LONDON A LESSON

Back in September, in a scorching heatwave, we gave London a much-needed course in the Tibetan language.

To raise awareness about the Chinese Communist Party's colonial boarding school policy, we set up a guerrilla Tibetan classroom in central London. Free Tibet campaigners were joined by Tibetan teachers

Geleg Pangri and Tenzin Norbu. Together, they attracted passers-by by offering to give them a short lesson in the Tibetan language, and then held their attention by explaining how nearly one million Tibetan children between the ages of four and 18 have been separated from their families and placed in boarding schools.

Two of our allies, Navendu Mishra MP and Tim Loughton MP, joined us while we were giving classes on Parliament Square. We then moved to Trafalgar Square, where several tourists learned how to write their names in Tibetan, a language with a writing system over a thousand years old, but which is now being marginalised as the CCP promotes Chinese. Our leaflets about the boarding school system, designed to remind people of school books, gave our students a nice souvenir and some essential information about Tibet. Hopefully we will see one or two of them at our next protest.



Tim Loughton MP receives a Tibetan lesson outside parliament.

## RESIST THE CCP DAY

1st October is the anniversary of the foundation of the People's Republic of China, but in the UK we have worked hard over the past three years with Chinese, Hongkonger, Uyghur and other allies to rebrand it as "Resist the CCP Day".

A rally at Trafalgar Square was kicked off by our Advocacy Officer, Tenzin Kunga, who energised the crowd with a speech about how powerful we are when we work together. Then we started marching. With every minute, the march gathered momentum until a crowd of nearly 500 people assembled outside the Chinese embassy. We are happy to report that Free Tibet supporters and Tibetan community members made up a large proportion of the participants, with the photo overleaf capturing the passion and colour of what has now become an annual protest.

## WHERE IS LHUNDRUB DRAKPA?

In our last magazine, we included a postcard addressed to the Chinese embassy, demanding the release of musician Lhundrub Drakpa, who was sentenced to six years in prison in 2020 following the release of his protest song, "Black Hat". Over 200 of you sent in postcards demanding Lhundrub Drakpa's immediate release. We are flooding the Chinese embassy with your postcards and will not stop until he returns home safe. You can find out more about the campaign on our website.



# REFLECTIONS ON THE UK AND TIBET

**Free Tibet's Advocacy Officer, Tenzin Kunga, shares his thoughts on Britain's political balancing act on Tibet.**

## **Some of our readers have been supporting Free Tibet for over three decades. How has the relationship between the UK and Tibet changed over the past 30 years?**

I can think of two developments over the past 30 years:

One, in 2008, Foreign Secretary David Milliband changed the UK government's position on Tibet through a Ministerial Statement (issued without any prior consultation whatsoever with Tibet groups). It stated that "we (British government) recognise Tibet as a part of the People's Republic of China", gifting the PRC complete sovereignty over Tibet – a flawed position, according to us.

Two, in 2011, His Holiness the Dalai Lama completely relinquished all his political authority to a democratically elected leader of the Tibetan people (the Sikyong). David Cameron's meeting with the Dalai Lama in 2012 was the last time that a sitting Prime Minister met with his holiness. The UK government should have no hesitation in meeting a spiritual leader, a Nobel Peace Laureate. So why hasn't the PM met with His Holiness in over a decade?

It is crucial that the UK, as a nation championing freedom of religion around the world, engages with His Holiness as a spiritual leader, especially at a time when China is trying to politicise his spiritual reincarnation, and correct its position to recognise Tibetan autonomy.

## **How many Tibetans are living in the UK?**

Since its formal inception in the early 1970s, the Tibetan Community in Britain has grown in size from a handful of Tibetans to roughly more than 1,000 Tibetans today. The vast majority work as professionals in different fields, including the NHS, education and finance.

## **What is it like to be Tibetan in the UK?**

Having lived here for almost ten years, I feel sad to see the lack of any political support from the UK government for Tibet. I arrived here during David Cameron's "Golden Era" relationship between the UK and China. When Xi Jinping arrived here to a red carpet welcome during his state visit, the government shielded him from protests by activist groups, which did not stop us from expressing our dissent. It is sad to see the once mighty British government lacking the spine to stand up to China for want of trade, paying only lip service to defending fundamental values like freedom, rule of law and liberty.

Given China's weaponisation of critical supplies during the pandemic, its increasing repression of Uyghurs (which the UN human rights chief termed as "crimes against humanity"), and the crushing of freedom in Hong Kong, perceptions of China have changed drastically in the UK and beyond. But with the former PM David Cameron's re-emergence as Foreign Secretary, I am yet again concerned.

What gives me hope is the strength and resilience of the Tibetan Community in Britain and the energy of the younger generation of Tibetans. Understanding the importance of preserving the rich Tibetan language and culture, which faces the increasing threat of extinction under China's control in Tibet, Tibetans here and elsewhere in the diaspora are doing our best to protect, preserve and promote our Tibetan identity through observing Tibetan cultural anniversaries and through weekend language and music classes here in London.

## **If you could spend 5 minutes alone with PM Rishi Sunak, what would you say to him?**

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has been a tireless advocate for peace and Ahimsa, the concept of non-violence with its origin in Arya Bhumi India, which has shaped Tibetan people's resistance against China all these years. Britain has a historical responsibility to ensure that the Tibetan people's deep conviction and faith in non-violent resistance is not allowed to fail.



1948 Tibetan passport with UK Visa; Tenzin Kunga at a rally in 2023.



# YOUR LEGACY IS THIS MOVEMENT



We're a **small non-profit organisation**. Could you remember Free Tibet in your will? Free Tibet exists because Tibetans have the right to decide their own future. What that future is depends on what we do today.

Your gift doesn't need to be a large amount to make an impact. Even if you give 99% to your loved ones, **just 1% left as a legacy** to Free Tibet will provide **instrumental support** to our campaigns, research and advocacy work. All you need to do is share our name and company number (03103487) with your solicitor.



I've been a supporter since Free Tibet started over 35 years ago and as a hard-hitting and uncompromising campaign, I trust Free Tibet won't give up until freedom is won. That could be long after I'm gone!

Sue Byrne, pledging to give a legacy to Free Tibet & Tibet Watch

Find out more by on our website:  
[www.freetibet.org/legacy](http://www.freetibet.org/legacy)

Or contact us on +44 (0)330 016 8404 or [legacy@freetibet.org](mailto:legacy@freetibet.org)



# WINS FOR TIBET THIS YEAR

**2023 was a year of immense growth and victories for the Tibetan liberation movement. Through the tireless efforts of activists and friends from across the movement, we have seen major wins for Tibet. These are our proudest moments.**

## GROUNDBREAKING REPORT ON TORTURE IN DRAGO COUNTY

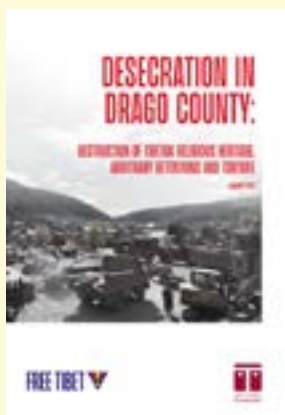
In January, Free Tibet and Tibet Watch released *Desecration in Drago County: Destruction of Tibetan religious heritage, arbitrary detentions and torture*. The report was the culmination of 18 months of research, including pivotal interviews with Tibetan sources. Tibetans risked their lives to share information with us – and this risk has not been in vain.

Drago County is on the front line of China's war on Buddhism, facing widespread religious repression affecting all aspects of Tibetan life and culture. This report has allowed us to bring this crisis to international attention.

The launch of the report at the Houses of Parliament was one of our most successful ever with several MPs and government officials in attendance. Fiona Bruce MP, Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, has delivered copies of the report to the

Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office. A former resident of Drago County also spoke at the event. They took the opportunity to share their experiences with MPs and researchers in person, and helped strengthen the call for action.

You can find the report on the Free Tibet website. Search "Free Tibet Drago County".



## WORLD-LEADING TIBETAN RESEARCHER VISITS LONDON

Free Tibet was proud to welcome Tibetan educator Dr Gyal Lo to the UK in March. Dr Gyal Lo (above centre) is one of the world's leading experts on Tibet's colonial boarding school system that is at the centre of the Protect Tibet's Children campaign.

Having visited more than 50 colonial boarding schools before escaping Tibet in 2020, Dr Gyal Lo's insights into the system are invaluable. The highlight of his visit was a parliamentary reception, in which Dr Gyal Lo met over 20 MPs, telling them face to face about the cruelty of the boarding school system, where Tibetan children are separated from their families, language and culture.

We are incredibly grateful to Dr Gyal Lo for his visit. We hope he will be able to return soon for a UK speaking tour.

## MOST SUCCESSFUL TIBET MATCH IN THE HISTORY OF FREE TIBET

2023 was also our most successful year for Tibet Match ever, with over £32,000 raised for Tibet Watch! Using satellite and drone images, firsthand testimonies, and extensive analysis, Tibet Watch builds a picture of a human rights crisis in one of the most closed-off places in the world. Tibet Watch retrieves news from Tibet against all the odds.

Thanks to the generosity of Free Tibet and Tibet Watch supporters, we have been able to continue to produce hard-hitting research into China's ongoing occupation of Tibet for another year, amplifying the voices of Tibetans around the world.

**TIBET  
WATCH**



## ACTION AGAINST US COMPANY FUNDING DNA ABUSE IN TIBET

In May, Free Tibet's Digital Officer, Rabga, travelled to Boston USA to protest



against Thermo Fisher Scientific during their Annual General Meeting (AGM). Alongside friends from Students for a Free Tibet, we were able to confront the company for their complicity in the mass collection of DNA in Tibet.

Activists took over Boston, protesting outside Thermo Fisher HQ during the AGM and then holding a huge rally in the city. With our help, two sympathetic shareholders raised questions with the company, forcing a desperate response from its investor relations team.

On top of this, through the generous help of our supporters, we were able to send an ad-van around London to key landmarks. We engaged with the public and politicians to spread awareness of Thermo Fisher's role in human rights abuse. By creating this unwanted public attention for the company and its CEO, Marc Casper, we will force them to take responsibility and block sales of its DNA kits to police.

## TIBETAN REFUGEES REVEAL NEW INFORMATION

Researchers at Tibet Watch have interviewed at least 10 Tibetan refugees in 2023.

The dedicated research team works across five languages, interviewing and collecting testimonies from Tibetan refugees from their office in Dharamsala, India. They are determined to ensure these stories are shared far and wide, and that the testimonies are reliably translated to reflect the gravity they hold.

There used to be a steady stream of testimonies from Tibetan refugees. But every year, fewer and fewer Tibetans are escaping Tibet. These testimonies are rare, and they're hugely important. Tibetans who shared their stories with us have provided vital insights into the daily oppression faced by ordinary people.

From accounts of colonial boarding schools and the systematic erasure of the Tibetan language, to stories of religious and cultural repression leading to arrests and torture, these interviews are a vital part of understanding the situation inside Tibet. It is our hope that these stories do not go unnoticed, and that the brave individuals who have taken the time to share those experiences with Free Tibet and Tibet Watch have their accounts heard by the whole world.

## HIKVISION CONTINUES TO BE PUSHED OUT OF THE UK

Over the past year, we have seen a number of tangible victories in our joint Hikvision campaign, especially across the private sector. Supermarkets Tesco and Morrisons have pledged to stop using Hikvision CCTV cameras in their stores, alongside others such as Iceland, Co-Op, and Marks & Spencer.

We've also seen progress in the public sector, with the announcement that Hikvision cameras will be banned from "sensitive sites" in the UK – including some government departments, military locations, and public bodies.

It is vital that UK taxpayer money stops going towards companies like Hikvision. We are determined to keep on pushing for further action against Hikvision and their complicity in human rights abuse. Our goal for 2024 is to see all Hikvision cameras banned from the public sector.



## FREE TIBET IS A SMALL NON-PROFIT ORGANISATION

You might be surprised to hear that we have just four campaigners at our office in south London. Free Tibet is a small organisation making a big impact, which means your donations really count.

**When you set up a monthly gift to Free Tibet, your money will go further.** You make us better able to plan ahead and create long-lasting, powerful campaigns. And it means we can be reactive and impactful right when we need to be.

If you're a Regular Giver already – we see you. Your contributions are funding research reports, parliamentary advocacy, and international demonstrations.

**The average monthly gift to Free Tibet is £7. Can you match it?** Please visit [freetibet.org](http://freetibet.org) or return the enclosed form in the freepost envelope.

# “ IT IS SCARY TO TALK

## A TIBETAN REFUGEE BEARS WITNESS

In September, Tibet Watch interviewed a forty-year-old woman, Rinsang\*. During her interview, Rinsang talked about how her father was involved in the 1959 Tibetan uprising, how her family were treated as “class enemies” and how she found hope by reading the Dalai Lama’s autobiography. You can read the full testimony on our website at [freetibet.org](http://freetibet.org). Rinsang’s account is translated from Tibetan and has been edited for length and clarity.

Rinsang shares her experiences from Tibet.

### My family endured immense suffering

I went to school up to seventh grade, then I dropped out. The reason for my decision was my family background. My family had close connections with religious figures. After His Holiness the Dalai Lama and thousands of Tibetans fled Tibet (in 1959), my father was imprisoned for seven years in a jail in Lhasa, in the name of being reactionary.

After his release, my family endured immense suffering due to our family background. Our family was labelled “reactionary” for our past family connections and endured humiliating struggle sessions during the Cultural Revolution. A brother of my grandfather disappeared and was never found again. My sisters and brothers all have limited rights. During the land redistribution, I was denied land rights.

When I was in seventh grade, I learned that I had no right to enrol in a military unit due to my family background. I felt that nothing was going to work in my favour even if I continued my studies because of my family background. So I left school and worked

for a few years on the farm. It was difficult to find a good job. Then I contacted an old friend from school and moved to Lhasa. I found a job in a restaurant and worked there for a year. After that, I worked as a saleswoman in a mall.

My mother used to share with me her life story and struggle. She had a copy of the biography of His Holiness, My Land and My People, hidden in a sack of grain. When I was young, I read it a few times. She found out afterward that I was reading it and told me to never again take it outside home as it would cause trouble if the authorities found out; our families were already being closely watched by the authorities.

Behind: Religious scriptures are burned near Jokhang Temple in Lhasa during the Cultural Revolution. Right: Struggle sessions were common during the Cultural Revolution, with people accused of being ‘reactionaries’ and ‘class enemies’ being publicly humiliated and beaten.



### **Nowadays, you cannot trust anyone**

In 2022, a Tibetan man called Tsewang Norbu set himself on fire in front of the Potala Palace in Lhasa. People who were walking nearby saw it. But it was immediately covered up, and police forces were massively deployed at the scene. I heard this from people and saw many social media posts sharing his song with prayers and emojis.

The online posts said: "We need to stand together". Others expressed pride in his action. But these were immediately removed and no one shared or talked about it. People warned each other not to talk about it as it might lead to detention and arrest.

Lhasa is routinely scrutinised, and surveillance measures run all the time. Military helicopters hover above the city at all times and paramilitary patrol the city. There are lots of security check posts at many points in Lhasa. We can easily recognize if something has happened in the city – whether it is a visit by Xi or any political activity because the police presence and movement would be noticeable.

You often see Tibetans waving Chinese flags and welcoming Chinese delegations in Tibet, but it is also true that most of the Tibetans you see waving Chinese flags when visiting Chinese delegations were mostly forced. Not volunteers. Those people are connected with the Chinese Communist Party and government. They are dependent on the government. They used to host those events and film them in the early morning. I saw it a few times when I used to go to work in the office.

Nowadays, you cannot trust and converse with anyone. In the past, we could see Tibetans secretly talking about everything among themselves in tea stalls at Barkhor Street (in Lhasa) but you cannot do so these days.

There are lots of spies and many people get arrested too. You cannot trust and the environment is brimmed with paranoia. Secret cameras and surveillance cameras are everywhere in Lhasa. It became more and more after the 2008 uprising; military tanks

strolled the streets of Lhasa every day. Not only police but armed military also patrolled the streets of Lhasa.

It is very difficult to keep in touch with Tibetans living outside Tibet. It is scary to talk.



Tsewang Norbu

### **Chinese is being taught everywhere**

China has set up pre-school boarding schools in every village in Tibet. They have made it compulsory for all. During our time, we had few boarding schools, and children aged only above six or seven were being enrolled.

Tibetan kids who are becoming fluent in Chinese and Tibetan language are creating a lot of concerns. Even when they read Tibetan texts, they read slowly. And they read like a Chinese person reading Tibetan. They are mixing Chinese language in every conversation. Their competency in the Tibetan



The Barkhor in Lhasa. A security camera is visible under a prayer wheel in the upper right corner. Tourists – and security cameras – look down on the Potala Palace in Lhasa

language is very low and Tibetan parents are worried about their children's Tibetan language skill.

The Chinese language is being taught everywhere. My friend who is studying in a medical institute in Lhasa recently told me that they were learning the Chinese language and she is taking coaching classes in the Chinese language.

The primary goals of Chinese language teaching and education are to promote Chinese civilization and culture among Tibetans and suppress or wipe out Tibetan culture, civilization, and language. Tibetans are extra cautious and conscious about the status and prospect of the Tibetan language's survival.

### I tried to find a way out

I saw a video of His Holiness on social media in April. Videos of His Holiness with an Indian child were allowed to circulate in an attempt to mock him and they thought the Tibetans would feel disgusted but it backfired on them. Tibetans in Tibet were so happy to finally see him. They were more than overjoyed and all commented with tremendous praise. So the authorities were left with the only choice to block it again.

Their policy backfired on them. It was so good because Tibetans who are younger than me have never seen him in their life. But now, they can recognise him. They have seen him. And they will remember.

I had a deep longing to escape from Tibet and the wish to get an audience with His Holiness since when I was young. I didn't know how to get out of Tibet. I was young and didn't understand how to organise my escape plan and route.

I tried to find a way out four times before the COVID pandemic and I hosted dinner for someone a couple of times in the hope that he would help me with my plan. He turned it down afterward. Then I met a person who works in the railway sector, and he helped me find a route and a person who could help me. I paid about 20,000 yuan (£2,200) for that.

I then went to the meeting point on my own. He was waiting there and there were lots of military personnel patrolling in the area. I hid out in a restaurant for two nights. After that, I walked for four days in the rain with the helper until the border. It was very difficult.

My family background and the stories I heard from my mother left a huge impact on me and I felt that there was no future to stay back for.

*\*Name changed to protect her identity.*

## THE TIBETAN LANGUAGE IS UNDER THREAT

Make no mistake: **the Tibetan language is not disappearing.** It is being **erased by force** at the hands of the Chinese government.

It's an attack on multiple fronts, but it starts with **controlling the next generation:** around one million Tibetan children are forced to attend government boarding schools where they are taught almost exclusively in Chinese and separated from their families.

Our world-leading researchers are writing their **next research report,** revealing new information about the **linguicide in Tibet.** This is the very first report on linguicide to combine Tibetan refugee accounts with policy research.

### Your donation could:

- Cover printing costs for the research report
- Support ongoing monitoring by the expert researchers at Tibet Watch
- Fund a launch event at the Houses of Parliament

**Your donation could win the campaign. Please visit [www.freetibet.org/linguicide](http://www.freetibet.org/linguicide) or search "Free Tibet linguicide" now.**

Mountains on the Tibetan border.

# ADVOCACY UPDATE

## MPS SHOW UP FOR TIBET

Since the re-election of the Members of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Tibet in June, as noted in our previous edition, we are pleased that the first meeting of the group was held on 14th November 2023 at Portcullis House, Westminster. Four parliamentarians took the lead – Co-Chairs Tim Loughton MP and Chris Law MP and Vice Chairs Wera Hobhouse MP and Crossbench Peer Lord Alton of Liverpool.

The APPG met against the backdrop of the unfolding crisis in Gaza and the shocking re-emergence of former PM David Cameron as Foreign Secretary in the Cabinet reshuffle. With MPs voting on urgent bills in the chamber, many of the parliamentarians, including Shadow Foreign Minister Catherine West MP, Former Conservative Party Chairman and IPAC Member Sir Iain Duncan Smith MP, Chair of International Development Committee and Labour MP Sarah Champion and Crossbench Peer Lord Billimoria, could not join us and sent in their apologies.

The meeting began with a special chanting by a group of Tibetan Buddhist monks from

Gyuto Monastery, India, who were embarking on a UK tour. After thanking the parliamentarians for their support for Tibet, the lead monk Geshe Lharampa Thupten Sherab expressed his deep concern about China's colonial boarding schools in Tibet and its attempts to politicise the succession (reincarnation) of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He appealed to the group for support from the UK government.

Free Tibet's Advocacy Officer, Tenzin Kunga, highlighted China's Universal Periodic Review. This process, due to take place at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva in January 2024, will see international governments assess China's human rights record. Kunga urged MPs to ensure that the UK government raises Tibet during the review, and noted the importance of recognising "Tibet" by name at a time when China is pushing to erase it with the Chinese term "Xizang".

This period also saw Kunga organise delegations to the Foreign Office and several foreign embassies around London, calling on each of them to raise human rights in Tibet during China's Universal Periodic Review.



Members of the APPGT meet in November 2023, and (top) with Tibetan Buddhist monks from Gyuto Monastery.



# NEWS FROM TIBET



China works hard to keep news of their abuses in Tibet hidden. Thanks to the crucial work by our research partner Tibet Watch, we are able to shine a light on what is really happening in Tibet.

## TASHI WANGCHUK BEATEN BY POLICE

Former Tibetan political prisoner and language rights advocate Tashi Wangchuk was detained and beaten by Chinese police personnel on 17 October after he posted a video of government staff refusing his request for business licence registration.

Earlier that day, Tashi Wangchuk had hoped to open a car wash business in Yushu City. Following instructions from local police, he approached Yushu City People's Government to apply for a licence. His request was denied. Tashi Wangchuk filmed the refusal and later posted the video on the social media application WeChat.

Shortly after, he was arrested and handed over to the Yushu City Public Security Bureau (PSB), where he was kept under detention for three days and subjected to interrogation. Tashi Wangchuk later stated that he was beaten in detention by Zhi Husai, who is the head of Yushu PSB and the Vice Mayor of Yushu City.

Earning a livelihood remains increasingly difficult for former political prisoners like Tashi Wangchuk, who spent five years in prison between 2016 and 2021 after he spoke to The New York Times about his language advocacy. Even after his release from prison, he remains under constant surveillance and harassment by security officials. He has continued his language rights activism, drawing attention to the marginalisation of Tibetan in social media posts and videos. In August, a group of masked men attacked Tashi Wangchuk at his hotel while he was travelling to document restrictions on Tibetan language education.



Tashi Wangchuk after his assault



Middle school in Minyak County

## TIBETAN LANGUAGE CLASSES BANNED IN KARDZE

The Bureau of Education of Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in eastern Tibet issued a notification in early September forbidding Tibetan language classes from primary to high secondary schools in the prefecture.

This follows an order in March 2023, banning Tibetan language classes from all middle schools in the prefecture. Tibet Watch also received evidence in August of Chinese textbooks replacing Tibetan-language materials in at least two Kardze boarding schools. It is the first example Tibet Watch has learned of a formal announcement banning the teaching of Tibetan.



Tibetans burning juniper, an activity that has faced tight restrictions in recent years.

## FOUR TIBETANS REARRESTED AND SECRETLY SENTENCED TO PRISON

In eastern Tibet, four Tibetans named Bamo, Gelo, Khori and Tsedou were all handed prison sentences in September after a secret trial.

The four were first arrested in their native Serthar County in August 2022 and accused of holding religious activities including burning juniper and reciting prayers.

A fifth man was arrested alongside them, named Shukdar. Two days into the group’s detention, police summoned Shukdar’s family and claimed “he had died suddenly”. The family members were told to sign a letter stating his death as natural.

The remaining four detainees were held without trial or access to family members until their release in July 2023, but we have been able to confirm that they were rearrested and tried in secret in September. The four were sentenced to four years in prison. Three of the prisoners are expected to be released in early 2025 because their time in detention is included in their sentence. The exception is Khori, who has been required to start a new two-year prison sentence.

## TIBETAN JAILED FOR TWO YEARS

Tibet Watch has also learned of the arrest and imprisonment of Tsultrim earlier this year after he allegedly posted a photograph of the Dalai Lama on WeChat.

Tsultrim had already been detained and interrogated by police in Chongchi County in Ngaba, eastern Tibet, in July 2022. He was released in September 2022, but in March this year, police arrived at Tsultrim’s home.

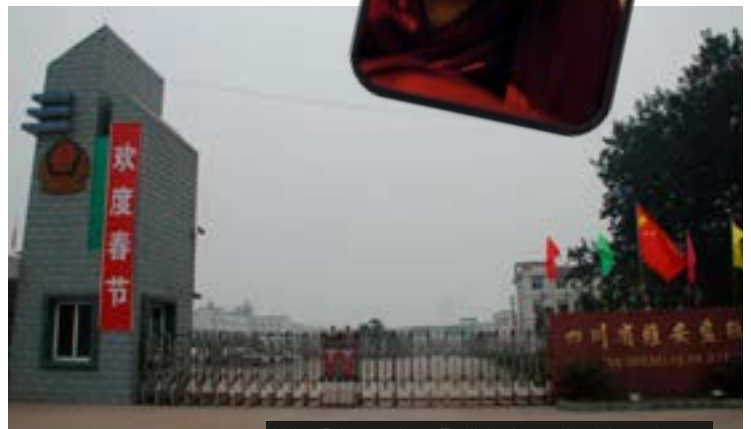
Following a further month of interrogation, Tsultrim appeared before the Intermediate People’s Court of Ngaba Country, where he was sentenced to two years in prison for having “contact with separatists outside Tibet”.

The trial was held in secret, with neither Tsultrim’s family nor a lawyer being present. Following the verdict, family members and close friends have been blocked from visiting him. He is currently serving his sentence in Ya’an Prison, the same prison where Bamo, Gelo, Khori and Tsedou (see above) are serving their sentences.

Possessing and sharing images of the Dalai Lama is banned in Tibet and, if caught, will often lead to imprisonment and torture for “inciting separatism” or other similar state security crimes.



LUCKY TEAM STUDIO/SHUTTERSTOCK



Ya’an Prison, where Tsultrim is serving his sentence

# SUPPORTER STORIES

Free Tibet received some incredible stories from you, from visits to Dharamshala to audiences with the Dalai Lama. These experiences still shape your support for Tibetan freedom all these decades later. Below are a few stories and images from the supporters who have written in.

If you have a story of your own, please write to [letters@freetibet.org](mailto:letters@freetibet.org) to share it with us.

## A TEXAN'S LIFELONG PASSION FOR TIBET

**In the heart of Dallas, Texas, Dr. Richard Behymer's tale unfolds – a captivating journey that weaves a lifelong fascination with Tibet into the fabric of his life. At 76, he shares a story that transcends borders, time, and circumstances, proving that a connection to Buddhist practice can be a guiding force throughout a lifetime.**

From a young age, Tibet beckoned to Dr. Behymer like a distant song. At six or seven years old, Tibet caught his interest and imagination. With a unique landscape, language and traditions, Tibet seemed to be “somewhere far away from my home in Dallas, Texas,” he reflects. Across a vast distance of geography and culture, Dr. Behymer learned everything he could about Tibet.

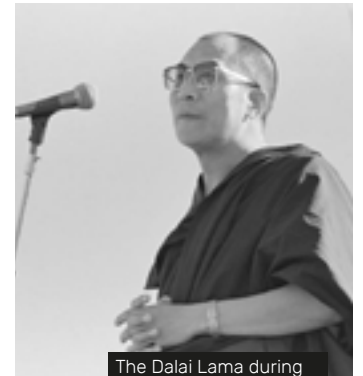
The journey deepened when Dr. Behymer's in-laws embarked on a pilgrimage to Tibet, travelling with a group of spiritual seekers. Their pilgrimage culminated in a private audience with the revered spiritual leader, His Holiness the Dalai Lama. This encounter, etched in the annals of family history, planted the seeds of a connection that would endure for generations.

Years later, Dr. Behymer got to experience Tibetan culture first hand when he got an opportunity to meet His Holiness in Santa Cruz, California. Dr. Behymer was fortunate enough to hear the profound teachings of the Dalai Lama, which left an indelible mark on him, further fueling his passion for the Tibetan cause. In an unexpected turn, during His Holiness's visit to Santa Cruz, his personal physician sought sponsorship from an American physician. Dr. Behymer, an M.D., found himself stepping into that role, becoming a conduit for the physician to meet and treat patients. In Santa Cruz, California, Dr. Behymer found himself face to face with the spiritual leader of a country that was thousands of miles away yet emotionally close.

Retired, widowed, and facing financial difficulties, Dr. Behymer has found solace in Tibetan Buddhist

practice. Tibet has remained a constant presence in Dr. Behymer's life – a picture of His Holiness graces his puja table, and a Tibetan flag adorns his wall.

Dr. Richard Behymer's story is one of a Texan who, against the norm, has embraced Tibet. Through his encounter with His Holiness, sponsorship of a physician, and a lifelong passion for Tibetan traditions, Dr. Behymer's journey resonates as a testament to the solace of spiritual practice, proving that sometimes, the pull of a faraway country can become an integral part of one's own story.



The Dalai Lama during his visit to Santa Cruz.

## NAOMI'S 42-YEAR JOURNEY WITH PASSANG

**Naomi Hull, now in her twilight years, began her poignant story with a reflection on her own history as a refugee from Nazi Germany, a journey that unfolded nearly nine decades ago. Her commitment to the well-being of others, shaped by her own experiences, sets the stage for a remarkable connection that spans generations.**

In 1981, Naomi and her husband Michael's lives intersected with the story of Passang, a young Tibetan boy navigating the challenges of life as a refugee. They were connected by the Ockenden Venture, a small organisation dedicated to caring for Tibetan children. Passang's parents had fled the Chinese invasion in 1959, finding safety in the Tibetan Refugee Settlement in India, which provided them with a plot of land in Bylakuppe – a place to call home following so much unrest.

Naomi and Michael decided to sponsor Passang's education. In their initial correspondence, Passang,



Passang in his schooldays;  
Passang offering a Khata during  
his visit with his family.



aged 7, was described as “healthy, friendly, and fond of games”. His education was of the utmost importance and his attendance at a boarding school cost 50 rupees a month in 1989 (or £3) which is the equivalent of £11 in today’s money.

Naomi and Passang exchanged letters for over four decades. The letters tell a heartwarming story of mutual care and understanding.

### **Passang writes affectionately, and shares philosophical musings with Naomi:**

“Our religion says that what will be tomorrow is dependent on today, so to stay happy tomorrow we have to do good today.” (March 1998)

As the years passed, Passang’s determination and hard work became increasingly evident. In October 1998, he shared his insights on the geopolitical situation:

“I think that China may be jealous of Tibetans with our strong religious faith ... But China wants to demolish even the name of Tibet.”

Passang’s commitment to his education and future career unfolded in subsequent letters. In 2006, he proudly announced his role as the editor of a newspaper, circulating in India and beyond.

“My English is not good you can see. But my knowledge of Hindi is much more better. I teach Hindi to my friends ... You will be surprise to learn that the last two weeks I was too busy in my news job as a editor of a newspaper, a bi-weekly non-governmental newspaper. We circulate about 1,400 in India and outside. The job suits me well. I have to work hard all the time finding for news. At present I’m accompanied in Dharamsala by my dad, brother and sister, in a very active place where our political and spiritual leader H H the Dalai Lama was established.”

### **Passang wrote with a lively voice:**

“My dear Uncle and Aunty, I had sent you two letters but I didn’t get any reply. Why is it so? I want to know the reason. If I didn’t get your letter for a long time, I am not able to study well... REPLY MUST BE NEEDED. I AM WEEPING FOR UNREPLYING.” (undated letter)

This heartfelt letter was accompanied by a self-portrait of Passang shedding tears.

Naomi and Michael retired to Gloucestershire, but their connection with Passang endured. Passang married Legkey, another Tibetan refugee raised in Bhutan. The Dalai Lama named their first daughter, Choezom,



followed by a second daughter, Dazae. The family later moved to Washington DC, where Passang became a successful journalist for Radio Free Asia, who report on advocacy and research by Free Tibet & Tibet Watch.

Spring 2023 brought a delightful turn of events – Passang, Legkey, and their daughters travelled to visit Naomi, fulfilling a wish held for many years. Journeying through Iceland, London, and stopping off in Bristol to see Passang’s brother who lives and works as a pharmacist, the family arrived in Gloucestershire in July. Passang promptly took over the cooking with Legkey. They cooked delicious momos, curries, handmade breads, and sauces. Naomi’s son Nick took them to Gloucester Cathedral, where some of the Harry Potter films were made, which caught the attention of Passang’s teenage daughters. Passang also took Naomi for her morning walk to Minchinhampton every day.

They treated Naomi with gifts of Ayurvedic massage oil and beautiful wall hangings and a silk scarf. Naomi told Free Tibet that “it was very special for all of us to finally meet after 42 years of friendship”.

As Naomi reflected on this 42-year journey, she emphasised the power of compassion and the profound impact that helping one person can have on the lives of many. Passang’s transformation from child refugee to dedicated journalist amplifying the voices of his people through Radio Free Asia is a testament to the ripple effect of kindness. Naomi and Passang’s story exemplifies that generosity and compassion are borderless. Just as Naomi received support as a child refugee, years later, she was able to offer help to someone in need.

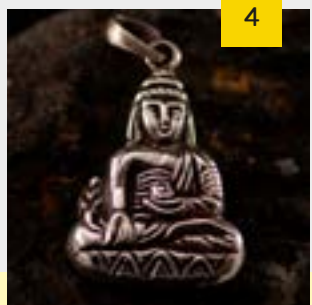
# FREE TIBET SHOP

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