

DANGEROUS CROSSING:

CONDITIONS IMPACTING THE FLIGHT OF
TIBETAN REFUGEES | 2006 REPORT



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The International Campaign for Tibet is a non-profit membership organization that monitors and promotes internationally recognized human rights in Tibet. ICT was founded in 1988 and has offices in Washington, DC, Amsterdam, Berlin and Brussels.

Dangerous Crossing:

Conditions Impacting the Flight of Tibetan Refugees | 2006 Update

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COVER PHOTO: Chinese soldiers approach the body of Kelsang Namtso, the 17-year old Tibetan nun killed when Chinese border patrols opened fire on a group of Tibetans escaping into exile across the Nangpa Pass on September 30, 2006. The image was obtained by ICT from a British climber who wished to remain anonymous.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Around 2,500 to 3,500 Tibetans make the dangerous crossing through the Himalayas into exile in Nepal, and from there to India, each year. In 2006, fewer traveled into Nepal compared to 2004 and 2005, with less than 2,600 registering at the Tibetan Refugee Reception Center in Kathmandu. For many, the main or only purpose of their journey is to see their religious leader, the Dalai Lama. A high percentage of the new refugees are children sent by their parents to study in Tibetan exile schools due to inadequate or unaffordable schools in Tibet, and monks and nuns seeking to practice their religion in exile due to persecution in Tibet. Other Tibetans leave because they have been relocated from their land in order to make way for development projects under China's transformative economic plan for its poor western areas, or because they are unable to develop or maintain a livelihood in competition with increasing numbers of Chinese migrants. In recent years, including 2006, more Tibetans have been traveling with Chinese passports in order to go on pilgrimage in India and to visit relatives, and most of them will return home.

In September, 2006, a young Tibetan nun was shot dead by Chinese police on the Nangpa Pass, the main trading route between Tibet and Nepal which is commonly used as an escape route by Tibetans fleeing into exile. It was the first time that such an incident had been observed by such a large group of international witnesses — climbers on Mount Cho Oyu, overlooking the pass. One climber captured the incident on film, and the resulting footage was broadcast all over the world, focusing international attention on the dangers of Tibetans' journey into exile. The Chinese authorities described the actions of the border patrols who shot the Tibetan nun as 'normal border management'. This report also details what appears to be a precedent — another incident where Tibetans escaping into exile were fired upon by Chinese troops close to the border with Nepal.

Dramatic political developments in 2006 in Nepal affected both Tibetans resident in the Kingdom and those in transit to India. Peace talks began in May, aimed at ending a decade-long conflict between the Maoist insurgency and government troops, which has claimed more than 13,000 lives in Nepal, one of the poorest countries in South Asia. The end of direct palace rule in April, following widespread pro-democracy activism, and the takeover of a new democratic alliance prompted some optimism about Tibetan issues in Nepal. King Gyanendra was known to be a close ally and responsive to Beijing's policy directives on Tibetan issues — including the 2005 closures of the Office of the Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Welfare Office in Kathmandu, both critical to the welfare of Tibetans in Nepal and an established presence there since the 1960s.



An armed soldier guards a military checkpoint in Nepal close to the border with Tibet. The civil war in Nepal lasted from 1996 until serious peace talks began in 2006, and claimed almost 13,000 lives. (Photo: Jonathan Green — www.jonathan-green.com)

Even so, by year's end, there were no obvious improvements in the situation for Tibetans, largely due to China's heavy footprint on Nepal. Although registration procedures of a welfare organisation to carry out the work of the former Tibetan Welfare Office appeared successful, pressure from the Chinese embassy reversed this progress at year's end.

China's acute sensitivity over Tibet continued to be the primary feature of China-Nepal relations in 2006. Several high-level Chinese delegations visited Kathmandu and the Nepalese authorities reiterated their commitment not to tolerate 'anti-China' activities on its soil, while China continued to prioritise security and surveillance of the Tibet-Nepal border.

The proposed refugee resettlement program, which would potentially move thousands of Tibetans currently residing in Nepal to the United States, was met with strong protests from the Chinese government. The new Nepalese government has yet to consent to the program.

In recent years, there has been a quieter, stepped-up approach to refoulement (the forcible return of any person to a country where they fear persecution)¹ of Tibetans by the Nepalese police. While the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in Kathmandu was not aware of any cases of refoulement in 2006, it acknowledges that what happens in the border areas is largely unknown in Kathmandu — even given the resumption of UNHCR’s official monitoring missions in 2006. ICT recorded one case of a group of seven Tibetans handed over to the Chinese authorities by the Nepalese police in mid-December 2006. According to an eyewitness account the group was caught near Tatopani, which is a few kilometers from the Friendship Bridge, marking the border between China and Nepal, and Chinese security personnel came to the Nepalese side to take them back into Tibet.

Throughout 2006, the situation for Tibetan refugees in Nepal continued to be deeply insecure, both on the journey to Nepal, and once in Nepal en route to Kathmandu, with the risk of refoulement from Nepalese territory, and continued difficulties for Tibetans legally resident in Nepal.



THE NANGPA PASS SHOOTING

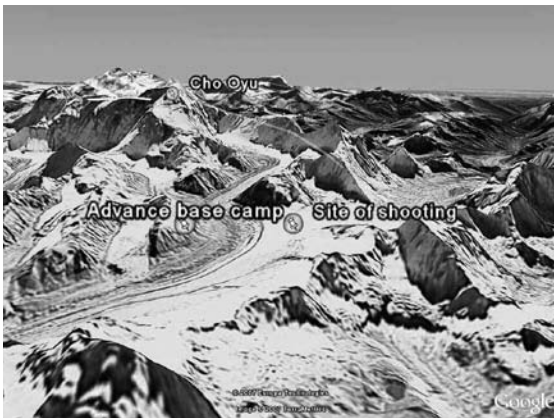
“THEY ARE SHOOTING THEM LIKE DOGS”

— Sergiu Matei, Romanian cameraman, on witnessing the shooting of Tibetan refugees on September 30. His comment was heard on his footage of the shooting that was broadcast around the world, refuting the Chinese official explanation of the incident that their police acted in self-defense.

On September 30, 2006, a group of Tibetans came under fire from Chinese People’s Armed Police troops as they were crossing the Nangpa Pass into exile in Nepal. The Tibetans were clearly visible from advance base camp, Mount Cho Oyu, a few kilometres to the east as they crossed the glaciated pass at 18,753 feet (5,716 m), west of Mount Everest. ICT collected multiple eyewitness testimonies and interviewed most Tibetans from the group who safely escaped into exile in order to document the incident.

PAP crossing a ridge near the Nangpa Pass, with Tibetan prayer flags in the foreground, following the shooting of a Tibetan nun. (Photo: a British climber who wished to remain anonymous passed on this image to ICT)





Google Earth image showing the area of the shooting. The Tibet-Nepal border lies approximately 15–20 minutes walk away from where Kelsang Namtso was shot. (Photo: ICT)



Three Chinese soldiers surveying the area where the shooting took place, approximately zoom away from advance base camp. (Photo: A British climber who wished to remain anonymous passed on this image to ICT)

To the onlookers, the Tibetans first became visible from Mount Cho Oyu as two lines of 20–30 black figures against the snow.² Several climbers said they could tell that many of the group were children, as they were smaller than the rest and moving more slowly; at least one climber speculated that the presence of the children had perhaps held up the rest of the group and prevented them from moving to the border more quickly.³

The Nangpa Pass serves as a main trading route between Tibet and Nepal, and is commonly used as an escape route by Tibetans fleeing into exile. Yak caravans and Tibetans escaping from Tibet are often seen by climbers at Mount Cho Oyu's advance base camp, particularly at the end of September/early October, which is a peak climbing season.

It was around 8 a.m. and the sun was up (one of the Tibetans said, “The sunlight had reached the peak of the mountain at that time”)⁴ so the Tibetans were in clear view of at least 60 international climbers and their porters and staff, most of whom were just finishing breakfast or resting in their tents. According to some reports, there could have been as many as 100 climbers, plus porters and staff, at advance base camp at the time.⁵ When gun-shots were heard, climbers who were in their tents rushed to join others outside with a clear view of the pass, and were horrified by what they saw.

The American climber and expedition leader told ICT: “I saw the line of refugees crossing the pass early in the morning before going to the dining tent for breakfast. I knew about the political situation for Tibetans in Tibet and remember that it crossed my mind that they were close to the border, and I felt relieved, thinking that they would make it safely into Nepal.⁶ But then our Sherpas started saying, ‘Chinese soldiers are coming, very bad.’ I heard the first shot and ran outside. There were soldiers spread out across the moraine [ridge] in front of advance base camp. Soldiers also appeared in the camp itself. I watched four different soldiers kneel down and take aim at the Tibetans.”⁷ A British climber and expedition leader recalled seeing one group of soldiers in advance base camp, another group of around

three soldiers on a ridge about 300 yards away, three further down on a ridge, and two or three more to their left (see accompanying images).⁸ One European climber who did not want to be identified said that he estimated three to five soldiers were firing on the Tibetans: “You could see them shouldering their weapons and there was a recoil.”⁹

The shooting at the Tibetans, who were desperately trying to reach the border to escape, went on for at least 15–20 minutes, with sometimes several minutes of silence in-between gunfire. Different eyewitnesses have different recollections of how long the shooting lasted, given the panic of the moment. Sergiu Matei, a professional cameraman from Romania who was on a climbing holiday, grabbed his camera and started to film what he saw unfolding before his eyes.

Two of the witnesses, a British police officer, and a former army marksman also from the UK, described the guns as being like ‘AK-47s’; they were Chinese Type 81 Assault Rifles (copies of the AK-47 Kalashnikov, designed for short-range engagements), the principal automatic rifle used by the People’s Liberation Army.¹⁰ The guns used have the capacity for automatic fire but most of the witnesses described the firing as single shots, rather than automatic, including the climbers



PAP personnel at advance base camp, Cho Oyu. At least one of the climbers told ICT that security personnel present filmed individual mountaineers present at advance base camp at around the time of the incident. (Photo: A British climber)

with some knowledge of firearms. Several of the mountaineers interviewed by ICT commented on the young age of the soldiers; “They were just kids, about 18 years old,” said one.¹¹

Several climbers also reported an “intimidating” atmosphere at advance base camp during and after the shooting; the British police officer, Steve Lawes, said: “The soldiers were so young, and seemingly volatile.”¹² Some climbers interviewed by ICT said that at least one soldier was filming mountaineers at advance base camp at around the time of the incident.¹³

The shooting was carried out by the People’s Armed Police, a paramilitary unit formed from the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) in the early 1980s, which is responsible for internal security, border control, and protection of state installations, including prisons. The PAP, which is the main body that patrols the high mountain passes where Tibetans attempt to escape into Nepal, is under the control of both a government ministry and the Communist Party.¹⁴ Bases of the PAP in the region are all fortified, have detention capability, and are used when necessary by People’s Liberation Army personnel. According to sources in the area, increased numbers of military personnel may now be being deployed in the region following the incident.

The video footage¹⁵ reveals that during the shooting, three Tibetans fell, but two got up again. Not all of the witnesses took this in at the time. The American climber did notice, and said later: “We saw three go down but one stayed down. I thought I saw other people stumble and jerk like they were hit. There seemed to be shooting going on behind a small hill, which we couldn’t see.”

The person who fell and stayed down was 17-year old Kelsang Namtso, a young nun from Nagchu (Chinese: Naqu) in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). Sergiu Matei said: “I could picture everything when I saw that small black shape falling down. You see a human life going down in a split second. That person used to breathe like you, used to eat, do exactly the same things.” Kelsang Namtso, like all of the Tibetans who were fired upon, had her back to the soldiers who were shooting and the bullet appears to have passed through her body close to her armpit, according to witnesses who saw her body afterwards. After she fell in the snow, she attempted to crawl upwards before lying still. Sergiu Matei switched his camera off: “I didn’t want to film her dying.” A still photograph of her body taken from advance base camp (the cover image of this report) by Slovenian climber Pavle Kozjek shows a second dark shape in the snow beside her, which is likely to have been the backpack abandoned during the shooting by one of her friends, another young nun, who managed to escape.

One of the Tibetan escapees, a young man in his late twenties, stumbled into advance base camp after the shooting in an attempt to get away, frightened and confused. “Some of the climbers were crying,” he told ICT.¹⁶

During the shooting, a group of PAP soldiers entered advance base camp together with a group of Tibetan children and adults from the group who they had taken into custody. The British police officer, Steve Lawes, said: “A group of about 10 to 12 children, who seemed to be aged between six and ten years old, were marched into advance base camp by three soldiers with assault rifles. The children were in single file, about six feet away from me. They didn’t see us — they weren’t looking around the way kids normally would, they were too frightened. By that time, advance base camp was crawling with soldiers. They had pretty much taken over, and the atmosphere was very intimidating.” Several climbers gave accounts of the children in custody, and images depict the group at the camp. Some of the climbers described the children as seeming to be resigned or simply bewildered by what had happened. At advance base camp, they were given food by the soldiers. Accounts from Tibetans in the group who made it into Nepal indicated that all of the children were hungry on the journey as they were not carrying enough food.¹⁷ A still photograph by Pavle Kozjek depicts the group outside a green tent distinguished from the mountaineers’ tents by a red Chinese flag.

According to ICT’s sources, most of the children may have been released before the end of 2006 to their families in Tibet, upon payment of a fine to their parents.¹⁸ But

Children and older Tibetans captured by the PAP are led away from advance base camp (the rucksack carried by one of the Tibetans depicts the mascots for the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing). (Photo: A British climber)





Soldiers from the People's Armed Police with a group of children captured on the Nangpa Pass. The group of over 70 Tibetans included children as young as seven years old. (Photo: Pavle Kozjek)

one reliable report indicated that all of the group aged over 16 were beaten severely while in custody with batons and electric-shock prods. A European government was told that the children who had been captured had been released almost immediately to their families. According to unofficial information received by ICT, the group was not released immediately and some may still be in custody at the time of publication of this report. According to the same Tibetan source, now in exile, the parents were apparently summoned to Shigatse to collect their children from prison after varying periods in custody from several weeks to three months or more.

A young Tibetan man was also seen by climbers limping into advance base camp in the custody of soldiers. In a photograph taken by one of the British climbers, what appears to be dried blood can be seen on his jeans near the ankle (p. 25). One European climber, managed to speak to the young Tibetan in advance base camp with one of the members of a Chinese expedition team translating from Chinese: "He told me that when he walked on it, he was in a lot of pain — the bone could have been fractured. When he was resting his leg he was OK. He seemed to be able to stand the pain. His injury didn't seem to be life-threatening, it was very low in the leg."¹⁹ The climber, who wanted to remain anonymous, said that he helped him to get some medical attention from the Chinese climbing team: "He was breathing pretty hard. They didn't do anything about that - no anti-pain meds."

The young Tibetan man has been identified by some Tibetans from the group who escaped into exile as Kalsang Namgyal from Kardze Tibet Autonomous Prefecture (Chinese: Ganzi) in Sichuan province, the Tibetan area of Kham. A Tibetan man in his twenties from Kalsang Namgyal's home area witnessed him being shot and told ICT: "The soldiers were shooting at the people ahead of me, and I could see some of the people throwing their belongings from their backs so that they could walk faster, which was difficult because of the snow and the altitude. It was difficult to run."²⁰ Kalsang Namgyal was sitting somewhere next to the track after he got shot in his leg and the nuns were running just ahead of him, and then the nun was shot and died."

The same European climber who spoke to Kalsang Namgyal said: "The children in custody looked dead scared to me. There was one [soldier] at ABC [advance base camp] who had a pistol and some more stars."²¹ So he was definitely higher

ranking. He was calling the shots and telling everyone what to do while they were holding the children and the man shot in the leg."

Several climbers interviewed by ICT commented on the attitude of the soldiers both before and after the shooting. Sergiu Matei said: "They acted as though [shooting Tibetan refugees] was in the course of a normal day's work." The European climber said: "Towards us, they were a little hostile, but overall quite relaxed. They knew exactly what they were doing." At certain points, soldiers demanded to use binoculars belonging to some of the climbers to scan the pass. The same European climber said: "One soldier approached me and asked to use my binoculars. I gave them to him. He was pretty aggressive."²²

Soon after the shooting, some reports emerged in the media of further deaths from the shooting. These deaths had not been witnessed by the climbers, nor had the bodies been seen by Tibetans in the group who safely crossed into exile. But there had been rumors of as many as eight deaths among Sherpas and Tibetans in the area, some of which reached the climbers and were published in the mainstream media as a result.²³ ICT could not confirm these reports. Further reports that reached ICT later appeared to indicate that a young Tibetan boy may have been shot and later died of his wounds while in custody, but these reports could not be fully confirmed. The official account by Xinhua appears to acknowledge that two deaths occurred.

SHOOTING CARRIED OUT ACCORDING TO 'NORMAL BORDER MANAGEMENT'

According to Chinese criminal law, Tibetans who cross the border illegally violate Article 322 and are subject to imprisonment for "secretly crossing the national boundary." It is also clear from reports about Tibetans' experiences of escaping into



A Chinese military base that monitors the Nangpa pass from Tibet into Nepal; anecdotal reports suggest that observation of the top of the pass is possible from the base. The Nepalese border is approximately 12–15 kms (7–9 miles) away. (Photo: ICT)



People's Armed Police personnel and officials gather around the body of the Tibetan nun the day after she was shot. An official in plain clothes is pictured center. Several of the police were wearing white balaclavas (ski masks). (Photo: a British climber)

exile that PAP troops have instructions to apprehend Tibetans who are attempting to cross the border. An earlier incident where Tibetans in the Dingri area close to the border with Nepal were fired upon sets a recent precedent for shooting at Tibetan escapees. This was backed up by an official response to one European embassy in Beijing, saying that the border police in Nangpa la had been acting according to 'Normal Border Management'.²⁴ Accounts by eyewitnesses to the September shooting indicate that the border guards appeared to view shooting Tibetans crossing into Nepal as a legitimate expression of their authority.

Approximately half an hour to an hour after the shooting ended, mountaineers reported that approximately three officials or police went to check Kelsang Namtso's body, and later, soldiers patrolled the glacier until sunset, as if they were searching for people.²⁵ As night fell, Kelsang Namtso's body could still be seen on the pass. Several climbers talked about going down from advance base camp to photograph her body as evidence of what had happened, but none did so.²⁶ When there were no soldiers in sight, three Tibetan nuns from the group who had escaped went back to her body after hiding in the snow for several hours. One of them told ICT: "We checked whether she was dead or not and she was already dead. If she had had a chance to walk for 15 minutes, she could have passed the border, but she was shot there. I tried to lift up her right arm, and saw that her chest was covered in blood

and you could see very bright red blood floating on the snow very clearly because the snow is so white."

It was not until the next day that a larger group of officials and police went to dispose of the body. A British climber, an experienced explorer and professional expedition manager, took a set of images through a telescope depicting the scene around the body on October 1.²⁷ The images depict around 12 personnel gathered around the nun's body in the snow. One of the officials or police is apparently taking notes and at one point another is pictured, after most of the group has left, lying in the snow with his hands behind his head.²⁸ Several climbers have confirmed that they saw members of the group taking pictures of the body. A shovel can be seen planted in the ground, which led to earlier reports that the nun's body was buried where she died in the snow.

Dr Pierre Maina said that on the morning of October 1, some more officials arrived in advance base camp: "They looked like officials, maybe military officials of higher rank. They walked along the glacier for perhaps three or four hours, and checked around, and at last they walked to the one body they could see, lying on the Nangpa-La Pass. More officials or police joined them." Dr Maina watched what happened through a pair of binoculars, and says: "They all stood around the body, and it looked as though they were taking notes and pictures. Then they wrapped the body in what looked like a red blanket²⁹ and dumped it [in a crevasse]." Sergiu Matei also witnessed the scene, but without binoculars: "They wrapped the body in something, and dragged it down to the glacier."

The whereabouts of Kelsang Namtso's body is not known, but it is likely that it has been taken away from the pass, perhaps at a later time without eyewitnesses. A Tibetan nun from the same home area as the nun who died told ICT in January 2007 that Kelsang Namtso's body has not been handed over to her parents.³⁰

Forty-three Tibetans, including two guides, arrived in Nepal following the shooting, from an original group of more than 70 Tibetans. Of this larger group, at least 15 were seen in the custody of Chinese soldiers at advance base camp, and were presumed to have been taken into detention.

Approximately 23 Tibetans in the larger group appear to have been lost along the way, before the shooting. According to reports received by ICT, most of them may have been taken into custody. It is not known if they have been released.

RESCUE OF A TIBETAN

Sergiu Matei, the Romanian climber who filmed the shooting, gave the following account to ICT of how he helped a young Tibetan in his twenties who had fallen behind the group that came under fire and hid in advance base camp throughout the incident:

“Soon after the shooting was over, a young Tibetan kitchen boy came over to me and said there was somebody in the toilet. I took my camera to witness that moment.³¹ I don’t want to know what went through the Tibetan’s mind when he heard my steps and couldn’t see anybody, I realized what he was thinking when I saw his eyes. I think he was thinking I’m done, it’s over. When he saw me with the camera I saw he was still

scared. He didn’t understand English, I talked to him in Romanian, I tried to make the tone of my voice warm and nice so he would understand I didn’t mean any harm, I told him stay there and I’ll be back with some food, I took some pancakes and some cheese, some leftovers from lunch, and I gave all that to him. I asked him if he was going to see the Dalai Lama and he just put his hands together as if in prayer, so I knew we understood each other. I went away from the tent and I tried to convince the base camp manager and the other guys he needs

a hot cup of tea and some warm clothes because he’d turned blue. It was not that cold, it was minus two — at that altitude it’s nice weather. The base camp manager and his staff were very, very scared and they said that we can’t do this, if they catch us they will shoot us. I told him there’s no point in being scared because if they come here I’ll just tell them that I hired him. They said no, no for a few hours. Then they just gave in. The base camp manager didn’t give permission [for me to help the Tibetan] but I just did it. I took him out of the toilet and into the kitchen tent, we walked right past some soldiers, I put a hat on his head and put my arm around him and tried to make it look natural, as though I was discussing something with him.



One of the police remaining on the scene near Kelsang Namtso’s body appears to be taking notes, while another lies back in the snow (Photo: a British climber)

I heated some milk to go with some cornflakes and put liquids into it so he can have energy to make it across the pass. I gave him as much food as I could. The base camp manager and some kitchen boys just told me to be very careful because they heard the Chinese knew that at least two Tibetans [from the group] were missing and were trying to find them. I gave him some warm clothes, he was shaking, and after the clothes he started to warm up, he didn’t know how to say he wasn’t cold any more. So he sort of indicated that he was already feeling better by making shaking actions, and then not shaking. At around 2:30 in morning, it was dark, and there were no soldiers or climbers around. We just stood and looked at each other. We looked at each other. Then his eyes looked down and he went into himself I suppose. Probably he was thinking and saying that he really must go now, it’s pretty dark, I’ll make it. When you see your friends getting shot across the glacier it’s pretty — you know — you think you will have the same fate. I gave him a pat on his back and showed him the shortest way across the glacier and said God will be with you.”

The Tibetan, a 27-year old farmer from Kardze in Sichuan (Kham) arrived safely in Nepal the next day and is now studying at a Tibetan exile school in India. He told ICT that the reason he had fallen behind the rest of the group before seeking refuge at advance base camp was because he had heard a child from his home area crying, and he had gone back to look after her. He does not know where the child is now. He gave the following account of his reasons for leaving Tibet:

“As a child, I went to school for six years, but after that I couldn’t continue my education because I would have had to go to the county school. Instead, I helped my parents in the fields and did the seasonal business of collecting Yartsa Gunbu (caterpillar fungus).³² Initially, I thought of coming to Nepal with a Chinese passport, but when I applied for it I was told that passports wouldn’t be given until the game of China and Western countries is completed [likely to be a reference to the Beijing Olympics in 2008, but this could not be independently confirmed]. So I decided to escape. I am a firm believer and follower of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. It is not only me, but the majority of Tibetans in my area desire to have an audience with him. Inhabitants of my home area have organised special prayers for the long life of the Dalai Lama.³³ The sad thing is that those [Tibetans who] couldn’t make their way into Nepal or who were arrested by the Chinese are not able to see the Dalai Lama, which was their dream and desire. I would very much like to seek an education. I feel that modern education in today’s world is essential. I will be studying at the Tibet Transit School [near Dharamsala, India].

“I would like to thank the climber who saved my life at Nangpa-la. I have in fact no words to express my gratitude to all of you and especially [the] one who had helped me hide in a safe place where the army didn’t see me or catch me.”



Three teenage nuns who survived the Nangpa La shooting, all friends of the late Kelsang Namtso, now at school in India. (Photo: Jonathan Green)

HOW I SURVIVED THE NANGPA SHOOTING

A nun in her early twenties from central Tibet gave ICT the following account of her escape from the shooting, and how she found Kelsang Namtso's body, on the pass. Her name and details have been withheld due to her concern for her family in Tibet.

"I decided to leave Tibet because I wanted to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama and then when I was in Tibet I never had a chance to go to school when I was small because we didn't have school in our place. I come from a family of farmers. So I am intending to get some education. I didn't try to get a Chinese passport before I left because even if I tried I couldn't have got one. In my area there are quite a few Tibetans who have traveled to India but none of them have been able to obtain passports.

I met our guide only just before we were about to leave Lhasa, when we were in the truck. The guide told me first that there were only 45 people going to India and when I reached the truck, I didn't have time to count how many people there were. But actually, later I learned that there were a total of 75 people in the group.³⁴ I was

traveling with the daughter of my neighbour, Tenzin,³⁵ as her mother asked me to bring her with me. Later on, I got to know others in the group. Some of them had paid 5000 yuan (\$644) to the guide, and others had paid 4500 yuan (\$580), while some had paid only 3500 yuan (\$451). I paid 4000 yuan (\$515). It was said that guide would charge a little more money from the parents of a child because the guide has to look after the child on the way.

When we left Lhasa on our journey to the border, it was already dark. After a couple of hours we got out of the truck and started walking, on the instructions of the guide. He told us that it would take around four or five days to get to Nepal on foot. This wasn't true.³⁶ Sometimes we stopped walking during the night and traveled during the day, but at other times we walked only after dark because the guide told us there were army camps nearby. We were often thirsty as we sometimes didn't have a drop of water to drink. We had left Lhasa on September 18, and we arrived at the Nangpa Pass on September 30. By that time, we had finished almost our food and there was only a little bit of Tsampa [roasted barley flour] left. We had to hide somewhere during the day before we went across the pass, so we boiled some water and then added the little Tsampa and then shared it with each other.

Early in the morning of September 30 we were near the climbers' camp.³⁷ Our group had split up because our guide warned us there were Chinese soldiers in the area and so we had to take another route, which was really dangerous because it was steep rock. We could hear some others shouting above us that they were lost, and the guide went to try to find them to bring them back. About 20 people were missing. After some time, the guide came back alone and said that he searched everywhere but he didn't find them so they might have been captured.³⁸ He said we had to go as fast as we could, otherwise the soldiers would follow us because they definitely knew we were somewhere around the area. So we went as fast as we could towards the pass, and that was when we reached the snow and saw the Western climbers' tents. Some of the group went towards the tents to plead for food from the climbers, and some of the foreigners gave them biscuits and sweets. While we were eating the food, the guide appeared in a rush and said 'hurry up and run, soldiers are coming.' And I saw some soldiers then. So we all ran in different directions. I was in the middle of the line and Tenzin was coming behind me. I was telling her to run as fast as she could, and to throw the bag from her back. At first Tenzin wouldn't do it because she said she wouldn't have extra clothes to change, [but she did]. Then we were left at the back with another girl and the soldiers seemed to be getting nearer to us, and I could hear the zinging of bullets in my ears. I was scared and we were all running everywhere, sometimes we were even walking like a dog [crawling]. I had to help the two girls with me and keep pulling them up and telling them to run.³⁹



The People's Armed Police brought a group of Tibetans captured at the Nangpa Pass back to this tent until they were escorted out of advance base camp. A red Chinese flag flies over the tent (not visible in this image). (Photo: Pavle Kozjek)

I saw the Kardze man who was later captured by the soldier,⁴⁰ and I shouted at him to run, but he said he couldn't. He told us to go quickly, and not to stay. When I looked back, I saw the Kardze man was sitting on a rock next to the road and the soldiers went to him. I think at that time he was already shot on his leg because he just sat on the rock and didn't move at all until the soldiers reached him.

We ran away from the group to a small curved hill which was covered by the snow and it was a little bit far away from the main track across the pass, so we hid there, covered in snow, until afternoon, for around five hours. It was only then that I realized a bullet went through the leg of my trousers, you can see the hole in my trousers. I remembered feeling something warm on my leg and afterwards I realized the bullet went through my trousers. But there was no wound, not even a scratch.

And after that, when there didn't seem to be soldiers shooting, we came back to the track and saw the dead nun. We checked whether she was dead or not and she was already dead. If she had had an opportunity to walk for 15 minutes, she could have passed the border, but she was shot there. I tried to lift up her right arm, and saw

that her chest was covered in blood and you could see very bright red blood floating on the snow very clearly because the snow is so white.

We then kept following the main track that the group had taken earlier when fleeing from the soldiers and were able to cross the border. We followed the footprints of the group in the deep snow; we were frightened of being frozen to death and dying there in the night. I was carrying a small bag with me and in that I put some different Chakné [Tib. Phyang nas: barley grains that have been blessed by a high lama or oracular deity] that I got from [various] monasteries. So except for that none of us were carrying anything to eat because we had thrown away our bags when the shooting started. Luckily, we ate some pieces of Chakné which really helped us and somehow a little strength and energy came back and we could walk slowly for a few steps, but then again we felt dizzy and almost fell down. We even tried to eat the snow. We all wanted to stop and lie down but we knew that if we had done so we would have died because it was terribly cold.

We kept walking, but didn't know where we were. If we took a rest, we couldn't feel anything in our feet. At daybreak, we saw some footprints on the path, and followed them. After some time, we reached the place where there was no snow at all. Finally we reached a small tea stall, and the rest of the group was there. Some of them were snow-blind and couldn't walk, so others who had sun-glasses were leading them. Only two children from the group had made the journey, and the youngest was a seven year old girl. Our guide actually kept counting the people on the way before the shooting occurred and said that there were 15 children. I didn't know their real names but some of them have nick names like Sha momo [Tibetan meat-filled dumplings], Shogkhog momo [potato-filled dumplings], Thukpa Bagthuk [Tibetan soup with small dough dumplings] and there was a shaved-head child, his nickname is Martang [skin bag into which butter has been tightly sewn]. I don't know what happened to these children.⁴¹

A DREAM OF THE DALAI LAMA

A monk in his thirties from Kongpo (Chinese: Gongbo), in the TAR gave ICT the following account of his escape from the shooting and arrival in exile:

"We left at night and were taken to a truck parked somewhere in a deserted area near a mountain. I don't know exactly how many people were there but afterwards I was told there was a total of 77 in our group. The guide had said there would be around 13 people — and the guide also said that it would take only around 10 days from Tibet to Nepal, so I was carrying food for only 10 days. Many of the group were even told that it would take only two days. Therefore they prepared food for

only two days. So we didn't have enough to eat for most of the way. The journey took 22 days.

When we arrived at the pass I could see the climbers' tents. I used to see the tents in a book when I was in Tibet but since I am from a rural area I hadn't seen them like that before. I didn't know until later that there were so many people in the camp and they were from different countries. I thought they were all from USA because when I was in Tibet, if I saw one westerner then I thought he or she must be from USA.

At the top of the pass, from a distance we could see some people, a group of around five people coming toward us. But we couldn't distinguish whether they were our people or whether they were soldiers. Sometimes they looked like monks because they were wearing the army long coat [Chinese: *Dayi*, a fur-lined winter coat]. As we got nearer we realized that they were the military. People were shouting and running. I went back to pick the children [I was looking after] but it was too late, I saw that both of them had been caught.⁴²

When I started to run, I could see the nuns were climbing up the mountain in front of me. Then the soldiers starting shooting. And I heard a soldier was shouting, 'Thama de' (literally: 'fuck your mother'). Actually the soldiers were very close to me when I saw them. I think there were only around 30 steps distance between the soldiers and me. So then I was attempting to run but I couldn't because I was so exhausted and famished and I was also carrying all my bags on my back. I tried to throw the bags from my back but I couldn't because I tied them very tightly with my shoulders as people in our place, Kongpo, do when they travel for a long distance. I only heard the sound of gun and the bullets came very near to my ears and sometime next to my feet. I was sort of lost and I didn't know what I should do. Suddenly I remembered His Holiness the Dalai Lama. When I was in Tibet I never called him 'Gyalwa Rinpoche' [Lit. The Victorious Precious One, the Dalai Lama] or 'Gyalwa Tenzin Gyatso' [Lit. Tenzin Gyatso The Victorious] and most of the people would call him 'thamché khyenpa' [All-knowing] and on that day, somehow I was telling myself to call him 'thamché khyenpa' [All-knowing] and pray him to help me. And immediately I started calling his name and praying to him, then strength came back and I felt my feet were very light and I was able to run as fast as normal. Everyone was running here and there. Some of them were climbing down the mountain and some of them were climbing up the mountain.

I didn't see [Kelsang Namtso being shot] but I heard that someone was shouting that she had been shot.⁴³ One girl in our group said that she heard a Tibetan soldier was shouting like this in Tibetan while he was shooting, 'Pharo Sa. Da khyoetso bod danga'⁴⁴ [eat your father's corpse, now I will see how you can run!].⁴⁴

I counted our group after we reached Nepal territory where it was safe and I learnt that 37 people managed to make it. But then some people came by themselves later and in the end 41 people made it to reach the Tibetan Reception Center.⁴⁵

When we were walking through Nepal, we kept hearing that the Reception Center is very near but we walked a long time and still didn't find it, so I was worried that I would never see His Holiness at all. We met an old man along the way who had a picture of His Holiness. When I saw the picture, I was quite shocked and at first thought it wasn't real [because his photograph is banned in Tibet]. I pleaded with the old man to give the photo to me, but he didn't.



Yak herders are well-equipped when it comes to travel across the border and used to camping at high altitude sites. Not the same can be said about Tibetan refugees. Yak herders often provide some assistance with food, shelter, or even just a cup of tea to Tibetans refugees on their way to Namche Bazaar. (Photo: ICT)

I left Tibet firstly because I wanted to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama and then secondly in order to have a Buddhist education in one of the monasteries in south India because I really want to become a good monk. Actually, I could stay in Tibet as a monk but the Chinese authorities always make me angry when I was in the monastery in Tibet. They always come to the monastery and say that all the monks have to denounce and criticize His Holiness the Dalai Lama and they always consider His Holiness as an enemy to them. They also said that the monks in the monastery have to study patriotic education very hard and the monks have to say 'Tibet is part of China', and so on.

When I was small I always told myself to go to India to get a blessing from His Holiness the Dalai Lama and I also used to dream about His Holiness twice and in my dreams, His Holiness was sitting on his throne but this time [when I arrived in India] when I had the audience with him, he was sitting on a chair.⁴⁶

The group fired upon on the Nangpa Pass was typical of many Tibetan refugee groups fleeing into exile. Kelsang Namtso, who died on the Nangpa pass on September 30, had never been to school and had become a nun just a year before, at the age of 16. But in her home area, there was no proper nunnery where she could obtain a formal religious education. Although a nunnery had been constructed in the recent years in her home county with funds from local monks, the government did not allow Buddhist education or religious practice there — it was simply an empty building. Kelsang Namtso left Tibet with a desire to obtain the blessing of the Dalai Lama, and to study in Dolma Ling nunnery, India.

Her best friend, a 16-year old nun called Dolma who, having reached India, is now at school, told ICT that Kelsang Namtso had been an intense, serious young woman who wanted to pursue a religious vocation against her parents' wishes. Her parents are poor, and wanted her to work on the land. "She was the only daughter in a family of five brothers, and her mother didn't want her to be a nun because she was the only girl. She said that she had to help her. But she [Kelsang Namtso] was determined to be a nun and she used to spend lots of time reading texts. It was her dream to join Dolma Ling nunnery and see the Dalai Lama."

When asked why Kelsang Namtso was so determined to be a nun, Dolma told ICT: "She would say that this wheel of life is full of misery. If you could devote your life to accumulating merit, then rebirth is possible. You can devote your time to being a good human being. She was always emphasizing this." Dolma added that although Kelsang Namtso was frightened before crossing the Nangpa Pass, she was always solicitous of her friends' welfare: "She was crying [before we began walking on the pass] because she thought we might face problems in the mountains, and also because we had been walking for such a long time and we were sick with headaches."

Kelsang Namtso was one of seven nuns in the group who came under fire. The six nuns who survived told ICT when they arrived in exile that they had left in order to see the Dalai Lama and to receive a proper religious education. One of them mentioned that a particular source of despair in Tibet had been that local cadres would only allow women to officially enroll as nuns if they denounced the Dalai Lama. She said: "To do so would be beyond our imagination." She added that 'patriotic education' was conducted by local officials in schools as well as religious institutions in her local area in Nagchu prefecture (Chinese: Naqu) approximately three times a year.

There were also six monks in the group. One of them, from the same area of Nagchu as the nuns, told ICT that he had become a monk more than a decade ago, at the age of 12. He said that he had left mainly in order to see the Dalai Lama but

also in order to get an education and study at a monastery. Together with most of the group of 43 who arrived in Kathmandu a few days after the shooting, he had not received a formal education in Tibet. "These days children do not get a Tibetan education in school," he said. "When the exams come, most of the Tibetan students fail and only the Chinese students get the opportunity to go to a better school because the entire exams are in Chinese."⁴⁷ It is true that if you graduate from Tibet University [in Lhasa], then a Tibetan could still get a good job and maybe even become the head of a county, but this is becoming more difficult now that an enormous number of Chinese are migrating to Tibet and they are the ones with better job opportunities. So even if you have graduated from Tibet University, the chances are that you may have to be a teacher in a rural area."

Two other monks from the group, from Kongpo [Chinese: Gongbo, in the TAR] told ICT that they left Tibet because officials in their township were preparing to conduct a patriotic education campaign at their monastery. They were concerned that they would have to denounce the Dalai Lama.

Also among the group of 43 were several farmers and nomads. Several of the farmers and nomads told ICT that it hadn't been possible for them to receive an education. One farmer said: "The Chinese say they are building roads and the railway to benefit Tibetans. But these infrastructure developments are for Chinese settlers who live in the towns and not Tibetan nomads and farmers who are in the countryside."



BREAKING THE NEWS OF THE NANGPA PASS SHOOTING

An account by an American mountaineer of the shooting on the Nangpa Pass was first published on ExplorersWeb (www.mounteverest.net), a website for independent, non-commercial guides with news on mountaineering, ocean sailing, and polar treks.⁴⁸ ICT then heard direct from the same American mountaineer on Mount Cho Oyu, and followed up by interviewing other climbers as they arrived in Nepal from Tibet, and, later, most of the Tibetans in the group that came under fire. All of the foreign climbers involved were reluctant to speak out while still in Chinese territory. The American mountaineer who broke the news told ICT: "It's not hard to understand why, as mountaineering these days has become big business, so much so that to 'make waves' in China, and risk losing permission to have access to one of the high peaks would mean a significant loss of revenue to most commercial outfitters, not to mention that shootings do not look good in a brochure." The climber added that he was told by colleagues that he had been 'stupid' to report what had happened. Other climbers said that they had not come under any pressure not to speak about what had happened: two told *The Alpinist* magazine that their outfitter told them to act according to their own conscience and not to worry about the effects on his business.⁴⁹ Even so, only two climbers are known to have spoken about the shooting to the outside world while still in Chinese territory.⁵⁰ All of the other climbers interviewed by ICT spoke out either when they were in Nepal after the trip or back at home. Some climbers said that they would only speak anonymously because of concerns for Tibetan staff still in Nepal or Tibet, or fears that permits would not be granted to climb in Tibet again. Some of them said that they were still deeply disturbed by what they had seen, months later: "The shooting still haunts me every single day," one of them told ICT in January, 2007.

At least four climbers returning from Cho Oyu interviewed by ICT were tracked down to their hotels in Kathmandu or their trekking agencies by the Chinese embassy on return from their trip. Officials from the embassy had requested meetings with them, but these requests were not granted by the individuals interviewed by ICT. A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson denied that this had happened in an interview with the BBC afterwards.

It is notable that many of the climbers who came forward to give their testimony first were from countries that had once been under Communist rule. Two Czech climbers wrote to ICT after arriving back in Nepal from Cho Oyu to say: "We felt like we were 20 years ago in our country in deep Communist time, where Czech soldiers killed Czech citizens on their escape over the 'iron curtain'."⁵¹

On October 13, 2006, the Chinese authorities released their official version of what had occurred on the pass on September 30 (Appendix 1). China said that frontier

soldiers tried to persuade the group of Tibetan 'stowaways' to go home, but the Tibetans refused and 'attacked the soldiers', who were then 'forced to defend themselves'. (*People's Daily*, October 13, and *Xinhua*, October 12). The Chinese official account appears to refer to two deaths and one injury following the shooting. It refers to a death "during a conflict with border control guards" (*Xinhua*, October 12, 2006), and also states that "one injured person died later in hospital due to oxygen shortage", while "another injured person received treatment in the local hospital."

On his return to Bucharest, Sergiu Matei, the Romanian cameraman, was met at the airport by colleagues from the television company where he worked, ProTV. His footage was edited down to a few minutes showing the shooting and broadcast globally — dramatically refuting the Chinese official version of events.⁵²

Matei's footage showed clearly that the Tibetans who came under fire had their backs to the soldiers, were unarmed, and offered no resistance. Eyewitnesses and Tibetans in the group interviewed by ICT confirmed that there would have been no possibility of any form of 'attack' on the soldiers before they opened fire. At the end of 2006, the Chinese authorities had not modified their official position, despite the evidence.⁵³



A wounded young Tibetan man is led through advance base camp at Cho Oyu by PAP. (Photo: a British climber)

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE TO THE NANGPA SHOOTINGS

On October 12, 2006, US Ambassador Clark Randt delivered a demarche (official diplomatic complaint) to China in Beijing. The European Union delivered a demarche to China on human rights issues including the Nangpa shooting on December 19, 2006.

The EU was particularly concerned about the situation of the children that were arrested. The shootings were raised during the EU human rights dialogue with China in Beijing on 19 October, while Finland held the Presidency. The EU indicated a level of frustration with the lack of response from the Chinese side during the dialogue.⁵⁴

Dutch Foreign Minister Bernard Bot was among several European leaders to make a statement on the shootings. On October 19, he told the Netherlands Parliament that China should identify and punish those responsible for the shootings and described video footage of the incident as “horrible and very shocking”.

Finland followed up the human rights dialogue in December 2006 and brought up the issue again, asking what had happened in detail. At the time of going to press, the EU was still waiting for China to answer this question.

The issue was raised on October 18 in the Canadian House of Commons. Asked what representation had been made to the Chinese government and what measures were being taken to have the detained children returned to their families, Foreign Affairs Minister Peter MacKay said the ‘terrible incident’ was a matter of “abhorrence and dismay... Canada strongly condemns this act of violence against unarmed civilians as an egregious violation of human rights. We have formally raised these concerns [and] we will follow up further with the Chinese government and intend to reiterate Canada’s strong condemnation of this gross human rights violation.” Canada is also asking China to conduct a full, independent investigation and punish those responsible, as well as release the detained Tibetan children immediately.



THE NANGPA SHOOTING: AFTERMATH AND PRECEDENTS

Tibetan refugees escaping from Tibet into Nepal have been fired upon before on both the Chinese and Nepalese sides of the border, but this is the first such incident to occur before a large number of international witnesses and to be documented on film.

Following the shooting, the number of Tibetans leaving Tibet for Nepal along this route appeared to decrease in the winter months of 2006. According to sources in the area, more Tibetans appeared to be traveling by alternative routes. One nun who escaped into exile late in 2006 told ICT: “One friend told me that her parents advised her not to run away if Chinese soldiers try to arrest you and your group on the way into exile. Otherwise, they may open fire and may kill you like the nun Kelsang Namtso.”

Two Tibetan nuns who recently arrived in exile have reported a second shooting that occurred earlier, in October 2005, near the Tibetan town of Dingri near the border. According to their interviews with ICT, the group of around 50 Tibetans had traveled in a bus from Lhasa, and then walked at night for several days. As the group arrived near the Nangpa Pass, at around six in the evening, soldiers who appeared to be from a nearby military base opened fire. One of the group, a young nun, whose identity has been withheld, said: “The Chinese opened several rounds of gunfire on us. We thought they were just trying to scare us by shooting in the air. But then we realized the shooting was serious. Our group scattered and I have no idea about where the others are, maybe they went back where we had come or managed to escape. After continuous shooting for some time, many of us stopped running away and 23 of us were arrested by the Chinese soldiers.”⁵⁵ According to the same source, none of the 23 Tibetans detained were injured by the shooting.

The group of Tibetans was handcuffed and taken into detention where they remained for several months. The males in the group, mainly monks, were particularly badly beaten by electric shock prods, according to the same account. After being sent home after their release, the two nuns in the group managed to escape later in 2006 and are now in exile.

An earlier precedent occurred in October 2003, when a group of 34 Tibetan refugees were fired upon by Chinese border security while attempting to cross into Nepal over the Nangpa Pass. One of the Tibetans in the group told ICT that only 17 members of the group of 34 had successfully made it over the Nangpa Pass while the others were caught by border security. It is not known if any of the 17 who did not make the journey were shot. (See ICT report, ‘China Constructs Road Near Nangpa La to Stem Flow of Tibetan Refugees to Nepal’ December 3, 2003 at <http://www.savetibet.org/news/newsitem.php?id=552>).



Carrying a load down the mountain trail in the border areas of Nepal, along the route traversed by Tibetan refugees. (Photo: Jonathan Green)

In 2002, there were separate eyewitness reports by Western mountain climbers of Chinese border police firing upon Tibetan refugees as well as pursuing refugees across the Nangpa Pass into Nepalese territory. Nepalese police in Namche Bazaar, the main trading village south of the Nangpa Pass, told ICT that during their investigation of the border incursion, they collected at least a dozen spent rifle shell casings on the Nepalese side of the pass. No public reprimands of the Chinese were made by the Nepalese authorities at the time.

An American who lived and worked on the south side of the Nangpa La, and who has been to Cho Oyu base camp, said: “Sherpa and Tibetan traders from border villages on both sides of the pass are allowed to travel freely for purposes of informal trade, and those who transit the Nangpa La regularly say that it is not uncommon for the PAP to chase refugees well into Nepal — though never down as far as the Sherpa villages proper.” In at least two incidents in recent years known to ICT, Western climbers in the area have been fired upon by Chinese border patrols, although not causing any injuries.

THE DANGEROUS CROSSING: POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION IN NEPAL ON TIBETAN ARRIVALS

The UNHCR mission in Kathmandu includes interviewing all newly-arrived Tibetans in Nepal. With few exceptions, it registers most as persons ‘of concern’, although it refrains from conducting more in-depth status determination interviews in Nepal. After 1989, Tibetans entering Nepal have been allowed to stay for only 15 days as people-in-transit. Tibetans are provided with shelter and food at the TRRC operated by the UNHCR in partnership, since October 2005, with the Lutheran World Federation. The Embassy of India in Kathmandu issues the new refugees a special entry permit (SEP) to India, where the Central Tibetan Administration of His Holiness the Dalai Lama begins the process of resettlement, sending them to schools, monasteries, or Tibetan refugee settlements in various locations around India. All new refugees are provided an opportunity for an audience with the Dalai Lama.

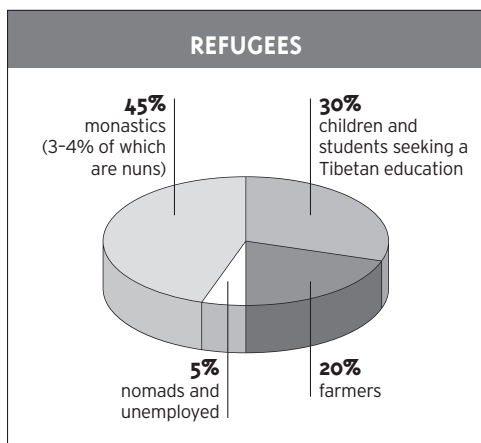
The government of Nepal permits Tibetans who sought refuge before December 31, 1989, and their duly-registered descendants, to remain in Nepal. Tibetan refugees who have arrived or will arrive in Nepal after that date should benefit from an informal agreement between the government of Nepal and the UNHCR, often referred to as the ‘Gentlemen’s Agreement’, which assumes cooperation among Nepalese police and government officials with the UNHCR in providing for the safe transit of Tibetan refugees through Nepal and onward to India.



A yak caravan crosses a long hanging bridge a few miles from Namche Bazaar in Khumbu, Nepal. (Photo: ICT)

Tibetans who arrived in Nepal prior to 1989 are meant to be provided with a “Refugee [Identity] Certificate’ (RC), which allows them to remain in Nepal with certain limited civil rights, restricted freedom of movement within the country (Tibetans are not permitted to reach restricted areas such as, for instance, Nepal-Tibet border areas), and some degree of security in case of harassment.⁵⁶

The Gentleman's Agreement is often abrogated by Nepalese authorities, resulting in refolement in the border areas, imprisonment of refugees caught in transit or in Kathmandu, and the imposition of exorbitant fines for 'violating' Nepal's immigration laws. The most well-known violation was the government-sanctioned refolement of 18 Tibetan refugees, including ten minors, who, on May 31, 2003 were handed over to Chinese authorities in Kathmandu, driven several hours to the border town of Kodari, and forcibly repatriated to Tibet. One of the Tibetans in the group later, who finally escaped into exile again some time later, told ICT that they had all been beaten severely once on the Tibetan side of the border and compelled to carry out labor in detention.⁵⁷ After the incident, anxiety and fears have increased among new arrivals.



As one result of the May 2003 incident the US Congress withdrew a bill that would have given Nepal duty-free and quota-free access to US markets for two years. In August 2003, Nepal's then Foreign Secretary Madhu Raman Acharya, conveyed the precise language of 'a newly adopted refugee policy' as an attachment to a letter to Senator Dianne Feinstein. It remains unknown if this policy was ever implemented and it has yet to be directly circulated

by the Nepalese beyond US government circles. Certainly, it has not been communicated to border security forces in Nepal, where it is most needed to serve as a form of legal protection for Tibetan refugees.

Fewer Tibetans were registered as arriving at the TRRC in 2006 compared to the two previous years. Just over 2400 were recorded as arriving at the TRRC during the year, with approximately a third of them children under 15.⁵⁸ The majority, as usual, crossed in the winter months — with the highest number, more than 300, crossing into Nepal in November.

Over the past five years, three-quarters of the refugees who arrived in Nepal were from the Kham or Amdo regions of eastern Tibet (now primarily incorporated into the Chinese provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan). Overall, it appears to be easier for Tibetans living in areas outside the TAR to obtain passports, but in 2006 it remained necessary to have connections and money to obtain passports.

THE RISK OF REFOULEMENTS

In 2005, ICT reported that risks for Tibetans arriving in Nepal had increased after UNHCR was prevented from carrying out monitoring missions in the border areas. In 2006, the UNHCR made four monitoring missions to sensitive areas along the border. UNHCR conducts these missions both to prevent summary deportations of Tibetan refugees, and to educate Nepalese security personnel about the existence of UNHCR funding for facilitating the travel of Tibetan refugees from the border to the TRRC outside Kathmandu. UNHCR officials who visited the border this year said the Nepali district level authorities understood the government of Nepal's obligation of non-refoulement, although they had persistent concerns about the role of smugglers.

Given the failure to conduct missions in 2005 and the subsequent four missions in 2006, whether UNHCR has a regular procedure for visiting the border areas, or does not implement this procedure, remains unclear.

However, it has become increasingly difficult to obtain information on refolements in border areas, which are often not reported or known about in Kathmandu. ICT has monitored an incident on December 17, 2006, in which a group of seven Tibetans were seen being loaded into a vehicle border in the small Nepalese town of Tatopani, approximately 20 minutes drive from the Friendship Bridge border crossing. The truck was driven and manned by plain clothes security personnel from the Tibetan side of the border, who took the Tibetans (four females and three men) across the bridge onto the Tibetan side, in front of several Tibetan eyewitnesses. One of the group was said to be a young girl who was under 18.

A Tibetan analyst in Kathmandu told ICT: "It is now believed that the prevailing attitude of the Nepali immigration office at Liping, Tatopani, is that it is legitimate for the Chinese to come into Nepalese territory to take their own people back. It seems that there are Chinese informants on the Nepalese [side] who inform border personnel about Tibetans in Nepalese territory." The analyst also said that unofficial refolements like this are regarded to take place more often than are reported, and that the Friendship Bridge border crossing continues to be one of the most dangerous crossing points for Tibetans crossing into Nepal.



The Thamserku range (21,729 ft, 6,623 mt.) blazes in the sun in a crisp cold morning. Just on the top right side on the slopes over the town is the route to the Nangpa glacier. (Photo: ICT)

A SIGNIFICANT DOWNTURN: UPDATE ON THE CLOSURE OF TIBETAN OFFICES IN KATHMANDU

The most significant downturn for some years in the political situation in Nepal for Tibetans came in January 2005, with the notice from the Nepalese authorities to close the Office of the Representative of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Refugee Welfare Office (TRWO) in Kathmandu — a move that was clearly linked to China's influence on Nepal. The orders came just days before the 2005 Royal coup. Both of these offices had operated in Kathmandu with the knowledge of the Nepal government since the 1960s.

Throughout 2005, sympathetic governments urged Nepal to register an alternative Tibetan office to partner with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in providing urgent humanitarian assistance to the some 2,500 Tibetan refugees who transit through Nepal every year, and to provide social services to the long-staying Tibetan refugee community, numbering around 20,000 throughout Nepal. In October 2005, the Nepal Home Ministry quietly registered the Bhota Welfare Organization, headed by a Nepalese citizen of Tibetan origin. But efforts by the Nepal Foreign Ministry to rescind the registration continued into 2006, causing continued uncertainty about the future for an organisation critical to the welfare of Tibetans in Nepal.

The Tibetan Refugee Reception Center in Kathmandu, Nepal. (Photo: Jonathan Green)



A small tourist plane takes off from the air strip of Lukla Airport in the township of Lukla (9,380 ft, 2,860 mt.) in Khumbu, eastern Nepal. Flights are susceptible to sudden cancellation due to the swift changes in weather conditions in the area. (Photo: ICT)

Despite this turning point for Tibetans in Nepal, for most of 2006, the transit process through Nepal ran relatively smoothly, with the exception of a period when the King's government stopped issuing exit permits. During this period, the TRRC was forced to shelter nearly 1,000 Tibetans in a facility that accommodates only 450 people.

Throughout 2006, the other risks faced by Tibetans of harassment and looting from Maoist or Nepalese armed forces continued. Many Tibetans travelling through the border areas were apprehended by the Nepalese armed forces during their patrolling of border areas where the Maoists are known to be active. In these cases, Tibetans risk harassment and maltreatment, looting of their money and other precious belongings, and often suffer beatings. In August, 2006, a group of five Tibetans including two monks were apprehended by Nepalese police near the Barabise police check-post in the Sindhupalchok district near the China-Nepal Friendship Highway, where they were threatened with deportation unless they handed over 4150 yuan (\$535).



KALACHAKRA EMPOWERMENT LEADS TO MORE TIBETANS IN TRANSIT

In late 2005, the number of Tibetans arriving in Nepal increased due to a major religious empowerment, the Kalachakra, being conferred by the Dalai Lama in January 2006. Thousands of Tibetans, including some 7,000 Tibetans holding Chinese passports, transited through Nepal to go to this important Buddhist ceremony in Amaravati in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh.

With this anticipated influx of Tibetans, in October 2005 the Nepalese government stopped issuing travel documents necessary for resident Tibetan and Bhutanese refugees to leave the country and, in November, also suspended issuing exit permits to Tibetan refugees transiting to India. In effect these maneuvers left hundreds of Tibetans stranded in Nepal, exacerbated severe overcrowding at the TRRC, and prevented the travel of some Tibetans in Nepal to the Kalachakra empowerment in India.

The issuance of travel documents for resident Tibetans to leave the country resumed in May 2006, and granting of exit permits resumed in June 2006.⁵⁹

It is notable that increasing numbers of Tibetans holding Chinese passports entered Nepal in 2005 — which was likely to be linked to the Kalachakra empowerment. More than 8000 Tibetans carrying Chinese passports travelled to seek blessings from the Dalai Lama in India in 2005, while the number was believed to be smaller in 2006. Many Tibetans holding Chinese passports travel to Nepal and India on pilgrimage — the stupas of Swayambhunath and Boudhanath in Kathmandu together with Namo Boudha, near Kathmandu, and Lumbini, the birthplace of the Buddha,

are the most visited sacred Buddhist places in Nepal.⁶⁰ In India, they travel mainly to Sarnath in Uttar Pradesh, where the Buddha preached his first sermon, and Bodh Gaya in Bihar, where he gained enlightenment.

As this report has shown, one of the main reasons for escape into exile for many Tibetans is simply to be in the presence of their spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, who lives in Dharamsala in northern India. However, this can also put them at risk on return to Tibet. The Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) requires new arrivals to have an Indian visa stamp in their passports or a Special Entry Permit issued from the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu in order to be present at an audience with the Dalai Lama. This is an attempt by the CTA to legalize the flow of Tibetans into India and give new refugees a start on the application process for resident status in India. However, an Indian visa stamp can lead to harassment, and possibly detention by Chinese security officials, on return to Tibet. ICT has also received reports of Tibetans having their passports confiscated upon returning from a trip to India. A Tibetan analyst in Kathmandu told ICT: “This has been a major concern for many Tibetans who come out into exile to see the Dalai Lama or on pilgrimage.”



Tibetan at the Kalachakra in January 2006. Thousands of Tibetans, including some 7,000 Tibetans holding Chinese passports, transited through Nepal to go to this important Buddhist ceremony in Amaravati in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. (Photo: ICT)

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Circumambulating the stupa at Amaravati, Andhra Pradesh, India, where the Dalai Lama conveyed the Kalachakra empowerment in January 2006. (Photo: Claudia Leisinger — www.singer-leisinger.com)

CONSEQUENCES OF CAPTURE DURING THE CROSSING

Tibetans faced continued dangers on the Tibet side of the border if caught trying to escape or to return to Tibet illegally throughout 2006.⁶¹ A Tibetan in his early twenties from Qinghai (the Tibetan area of Amdo) who arrived into exile in March told ICT that on his first attempt to escape from Tibet he was detained near the border at the Tibetan town of Dingri and taken to a military barracks where he was detained for two days. He was then detained for four months in a detention center before being returned to his native town upon payment of a 1200 yuan (\$155) fine.⁶² A group of nuns and monks gave ICT an account of their imprisonment in Shigatse after being caught attempting to escape, reporting that they were beaten severely, including with electric shock prods (see account below).

Informers who report the whereabouts of Tibetans escaping into exile appear to be active on both sides of the border. An ICT monitor visiting Nepal said that it was well-known among some local Tibetans on the Tibetan side of the border that

Tibetan refugees being given an emergency helicopter ride from Lukla airport to Kathmandu. (Photo: ICT)



informants were operating, sometimes local nomads or farmers, and were being well-compensated for their services.⁶³ In November 2006, a group of young Tibetans, all aged under 16, were apparently caught before they reached Nepal after informers tipped off the police.

The dangers for guides leading Tibetans across the mountain passes have increased in recent years, as longer sentences have been imposed on those who are caught. The crackdown on guides has intensified since the Nangpa Pass shooting focused international attention on the dangers of the journey into exile.

The value of guides for Tibetans lies in their knowledge on how to evade both Chinese border security and the Nepalese police (or to negotiate with the latter in terms of ensuring a safe journey to Kathmandu), and to navigate the difficult terrain and mountain paths. The fee received by Tibetan guides used to be around \$80-\$350 per person, often a year's wage for rural Tibetans — but reports in 2006 suggest that as the risks of the journey have increased, so have the fees. But Tibetans still know that refugee groups led by a guide are much more likely to arrive safely at the TRRC in Kathmandu than those without a group guide.

A group of more than 20 Tibetans fleeing into exile suffered beatings and interrogation after they were fired upon and then detained by soldiers in Dingri county, en route to the border with Nepal, in October 2005. A nun from the group described their ordeal to ICT, after she made a second successful escape attempt:

“We were handcuffed one by one by the soldiers. I think there were about 20 of them, and more came. They were all carrying machine guns⁶⁴ and walkie-talkies. Since the soldiers didn't bring enough rope, they tied some of our friends with rope and then took all of us to a place where they had parked their vehicles. We were loaded into the vehicles and taken to the army camp. We saw our guide and other monks later brought to the prison. When the soldiers were trying to catch us, the monks had tried to escape. We could see bruises all over their faces as a result of beatings when the soldiers caught up with them. We did not know where our guide was taken after that. We could see the view of the Nangpa Pass from the place where we were arrested.

“We females were badly beaten but not as much as the men in our group. The men were even hit with electric shock prods for making a noise in the prison. Female inmates were mainly beaten with belts. Upon arrival at the army base, we were interrogated one by one and all our details recorded. They took pictures of us. The interrogators were Tibetan as well as Chinese, though most were Chinese. We were asked why we were attempting to escape to India. We told the soldiers that we



Taken from the north this photo shows a valley along the Lunag-Kangchung trail. Crevasses, frozen lakes and loose stones make the walk difficult and dangerous for Tibetan yak traders and refugees alike. (Photo: ICT)

are going to join schools; we didn't mention that we are nuns. We heard that for nuns and monks the punishment is more serious.

The army also said there are thousands of schools established by the Chinese government and there is no need to flee from Tibet. We simply responded that we wanted to learn English. We were also asked whether we are going to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The next day, we were sent to Dingri prison where we were imprisoned for 13 days. Again, the police at Dingri took our details and interrogated us one by one. The police hit us whenever they were not satisfied with our reply. We were given food twice a day, breakfast was one small ladle of barley, dinner at 7 pm was one small bowl of Dreh-thuk (rice porridge).

Our group was taken to Shigatse new prison⁶⁵ on the same day. The police loaded us into a heavy military truck. All of us were handcuffed. We were imprisoned here for four months. About 20 prisoners were imprisoned in each cell, with two Chinese police guarding each cell. Most prisoners there were imprisoned mainly for attempting to flee into exile and returning back to Tibet. We were interrogated mostly in the first week of our arrival. For breakfast at 12 noon we were given one small ladle of barley and a cup of black tea. A small bowl of Thukpa (noodle soup) with a mixture of a little spinach, rice and boiled water is served. There weren't enough blankets and mattresses for inmates when we went to bed; a very thin mattress and blanket needed to be shared by two inmates. The temperature was freezing cold. We [Tibetans caught escaping into exile] were treated like criminals. We were described as supporters of 'separatism'. Most of us were assigned to work in the fields once they have been captured at the different border areas. We were assigned to dig mud and level it for about a month for planting vegetables.

After four months of our detention in Shigatse new prison, four policemen, three from [our home prefecture] and one from [our home county] were assigned to escort us to the prison in our prefecture. We were taken to our county prison where I was fined 3000 Yuan (\$387) after four days of detention. All of us were released on the same day. My parents and I were issued with a release paper and told if caught attempting to flee for the second time, a serious penalty would be enforced."



THE ROUTES

There are well-established historical and cultural ties between Tibet and Nepal. Nomads, pilgrims, as well as traders and businessmen, both Tibetan and Nepalese, commonly crossed the border in both directions from the eighth century. Many of these ancient trading routes, such as the Nangpa-la — nearly 19,000 ft. above sea-level — are still used by Tibetan traders leading their yak caravans from Tibet into Nepal.

In 2006, most Tibetan escapees made the journey when the mountains were deep in snow and glacial areas were frozen. In order to disguise their intentions from the local authorities, Tibetans en route often carry little food or extra clothing. Hypothermia, snow blindness, frost-bite, as well as injuries from slipping on ice or falling, are common. Injury can lead to abandonment by the hired guide, who is often key to evading border security. In the summer months, snow can turn to slush and fog can obscure trails and deadly crevasses.

This ancient route across the Nangpa Pass connects the Tibetan town of Dingri to the Himalayan foothill towns of Namche Bazaar, Lukla, and Jiri. Under ideal

Newly arrived Tibetan refugees rest by a camp-fire in Nepal. (Photo: Jonathan Green)





A Tibetan at the Tibetan Refugee Reception Centre clinic displays frostbitten toes after the trek across the Himalayas in 2005. No major frostbite cases were reported in 2006. (Photo: ICT)

climatic conditions the trek from Dingri to the Nangpa mountain pass usually takes two or three days but can take five and even ten days. It takes approximately another two days to cross the frozen Nangpa Pass, and no less than two to three weeks to reach Kathmandu on foot.

The town of Dram (Chinese: Zhangmu, Nepalese: Khasa) at 7,544 ft. is the gateway to Tibet for many Indian and Nepalese truck drivers who wait for days to receive custom clearances and continue on to their destinations. Here, Tibetan refugees seeking to enter Nepal must cross the China-Nepal Friendship Bridge. It is dangerous for Tibetan refugees to stay on the Nepalese side of the Friendship Bridge for long; according to a source in the area, if Chinese police hear about refugees taking shelter on the other side of the bridge, it has been known for them to cross to the Nepalese side and take them back into Tibet. From Khasa, on the Nepalese side, the journey to Kathmandu is more than a week to ten days walk or six to seven hours by bus, through the Nepalese border towns of Kodari, Tatopani and Barabise.

Tibetans also journey through the Himalayan regions of Mustang and Humla in the western part of Nepal. Some Tibetans cross through Purang (Nep. Taklakot) along the Humla Karnali River, close to Mount Kailash (Tib. Khang Rinpoche) one of the most sacred mountains in Tibet, worshipped not only by Buddhists, but also by Hindus, Bon-pos, Sikhs and Jains.

Because most Tibetans make the dangerous crossing through the Nangpa Pass into Nepal during winter, cases of Tibetans suffering severe frostbite, sometimes requiring amputation of toes, fingers, sometimes limbs, are not unusual. Although no significant cases of frostbite were reported by the clinic of the TRRC in 2006, several Tibetans underwent operations in Nepalese hospitals. There appears to be an increasing trend of Tibetans in transit to India receiving medical treatment in Nepal that is unavailable or unaffordable in Tibet — although it is still only a small number of cases.



WHY TIBETANS LEAVE TIBET

The government of the People's Republic of China takes the position that economic and social changes are improving the living conditions of Tibetans in Tibet and, therefore, that their loyalty towards the 'motherland' should be enhanced. However thousands of Tibetans continue to leave Tibet due to these so-called 'improvements' as well as political and cultural factors. Many Tibetans who leave in order to see the Dalai Lama or on pilgrimage return later to Tibet, facing similar risks on their return journey. Some Tibetans also choose to go back after receiving an education in exile schools, or after visiting relatives in exile.

REASONS FOR ESCAPE (I): RELIGIOUS REPRESSION

In 2006, as in previous years, many Tibetan refugees were monks and nuns who found it impossible to pursue a religious vocation in Tibet. Over the last ten years more than 45% of Tibetan refugees led monastic lives, including about 3-4% nuns. Monks and nuns continue to be targeted by political campaigns aimed at devaluing religious education and limiting monastic influence in the Tibetan communities, and

Cham (monastic) dancer, Kham, Tibet. Following the Cultural Revolution, Tibetans rebuilt monasteries and temples as centers of influence in Tibetan communities. Despite the pressures caused by Chinese policies, Tibetans continue to assert their cultural and religious identity by keeping their traditions alive wherever possible, particularly in the eastern areas of Kham and Amdo outside the Tibet Autonomous Region. (Photo: ICT)



the Chinese government maintains tight controls on religious practices and places of worship in Tibetan areas.⁶⁶

2006 ended with a ban on Tibetan government workers, retired staff and cadres, students and Party members from commemorating an important Buddhist anniversary in December, according to an official notice published in a Lhasa newspaper. The announcement, published on December 12, 2006 in the Lhasa Evening News (*La sa wan bao*), stated that it had become necessary for the government and Party to “strengthen and tighten up the education, guidance and management of the broad masses of cadres and staff”, and as a result it was not permitted to “participate in or observe celebrations of the Gaden Ngachoe Festival”, which marks the passing of the important 14th century Buddhist teacher Tsongkhapa, founder of the Gelugpa school of Tibetan Buddhism.⁶⁷

The open publication of the ban in a newspaper indicates the climate of religious and political repression in the TAR in 2006 under the Communist Party Secretary Zhang Qingli, a known hardliner on ideological issues. During the year, Zhang Qingli presided over the intensification of ‘patriotic education’ in Tibetan monasteries and nunneries, and the wider society.

The latter half of 2006 was also marked by increased levels of hostility to the Dalai Lama from Tibetan leaders as well as the TAR Party chief, and the requirement of some Tibetan government workers in Lhasa and other areas to make long, handwritten denunciations of their religious leader, causing considerable despair.

In 2006, ICT also reported on the imprisonment of some Tibetan monks and nuns for political offences, including the case of a Tibetan monk who told a gathering of students that Tibetans have no freedom of expression who was sentenced to four years in prison as a result, and accused of “doing great harm to society”. The Tibetan, Gedun, who is also a teacher of traditional monastic dance (*Cham*), was charged together with another monk, Jamphel Gyatso, with “the crime of incitement to split the state”, according to official Chinese information about the case obtained by ICT.⁶⁸

REASONS FOR ESCAPE (II): CHINA’S ECONOMIC POLICIES

Beijing’s economic development strategy, under the rubric of ‘Great Western Development’ (Chinese: *xibu da kaifa*⁶⁹), is arguably changing Tibetan lives, and the Tibetan landscape, more than any other policy. Beijing’s campaign to develop the People’s Republic of China’s western regions, including Tibet, is a high-profile political campaign, initiated by the then Party Secretary and President Jiang Zemin in 1999. This enormous undertaking affects 56% of China’s land area and almost



The new railway station in Lhasa, which opened on July 1, 2006. At a cost of \$4.1 billion, the Chinese government claims that the railway will help ‘modernize’ Tibet. However, critics counter that it is more likely to help Beijing expand military and administrative control in the region and Chinese scientists have warned that global warming could cause irreparable damage to the tracks within ten years. (Photo: ICT)

a quarter of China’s vast population, including Tibetans, Uyghur Muslims and other so-called ‘national minorities’.

The Chinese authorities say that the proposed development of the western regions will improve infrastructure, strengthen environmental protection and develop science, technology and education. But the reality is different. Western development reflects the Party’s agenda to control Tibet and develop the region on its own terms, on the basis of a Chinese urban model that does not take into account Tibetan needs, views and livelihoods. It represents the most severe threat so far to the survival of the Tibetan cultural and religious identity. While some Tibetans have undoubtedly benefited from the economic reforms, it is clear that they are in the minority.

On 1 July, 2006, the world’s highest railway across the Tibetan plateau was formally opened in Lhasa in an increasingly repressive political climate. Security was



An elderly Tibetan woman in a nomad resettlement area in eastern Tibet. Tibetan nomads have been increasingly moved into these designated areas, forcing them to abandon traditional ways of life while increasing China's bureaucratic control over the population. (Photo: ICT)

tight in Lhasa as the government stepped up its patriotic education and 'strike hard' campaigns, and Tibet's Party chief Zhang Qingli emphasized a "fight to the death struggle" against the Dalai Lama and his supporters.

Completion of the 1,142 kilometer rail link from Golmud (Ge'ermu) in Qinghai province to Lhasa in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) despite the high cost and considerable technical difficulties reflects the Beijing leadership's political and strategic objectives in the region. Described by the official press as the 'center-piece' of China's high-profile campaign to develop the Western regions, the \$4.1 billion rail link connects Lhasa with Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu and Guangzhou via Xining, bringing Beijing much closer to achieving the goal set by Mao Zedong over 40 years ago to integrate Tibet with China.⁷⁰

Prior to the opening of the railroad in July, a group of Tibetan women took the courageous step of protesting about the relocation of their homes to make way for the new railway station. The protest, at the gate of the TAR headquarters, was staged by a number of women from the area of Liuwu (N'eu), a village that was destroyed and its residents relocated in order to make way for the new Lhasa railway station. According to Tibetan sources, "The women knelt on the ground in front of the TAR offices, very humbly, saying that their land was taken and that they have nothing". The women were later intimidated into leaving by security personnel.

The 'Xibu da kaifa' campaign prioritises the development of the administrative and military apparatus of the state in order to maintain control of Tibet. So Tibetans are still suffering from increasing poverty, rural-urban equality, the worst education indicators in the People's Republic of China, and little or no health care provision in most areas. Western development is imposed from the top down in Beijing and fails to address local needs. Tibetans face increasing competition for employment and marginalisation within their own communities due to the numbers of Chinese migrants entering Tibet, leading to concerns for the survival of their culture and identity. Many of them escape into exile as a result of being displaced from their land, or losing their jobs or livelihoods.

In 2006, a rare protest took place in Lhasa at the end of October when hundreds of Tibetan graduates protested over apparent discrimination by the Chinese authorities in hiring for civil service jobs, according to reports by Radio Free Asia and other sources. No violence was reported and no one was arrested in the protest, which lasted for several days and took place in front of the Tibet Autonomous Region government offices and the Department of Education. RFA's Tibetan service reported that the protest followed an examination aimed at filling 100 civil service positions. Jobs were offered to 98 Chinese and two Tibetan applicants. The protestors were graduates from various universities in China, many of whom had apparently been assured that they would get jobs after completing their studies.

Over the past decade, approximately 20% of Tibetans arriving in exile were farmers and 5% were nomads and unemployed; a percentage that may increase as economic policy continues to have a dramatic impact on the Tibetan landscape and people.

China has a policy of settling herders, saying that it aims to improve the economic viability of animal husbandry and lessen the effects of natural disasters on the livelihood of Tibetan herders. The unspoken agenda clearly involves a greater administrative control over a population with fixed addresses. For many nomads, the transition to a more urban lifestyle is difficult. They are often being resettled into featureless blocks of housing by the side of roads or in newly created urban areas, and face a new problem of creating an entirely new and sustainable livelihood. The imposition of Chinese urban and industrial models on traditional modes of production amongst Tibet's nomads is leading to increasing poverty and contributing to grassland degradation, according to the findings of surveys of nomadic communities carried out in eastern Tibetan areas. ICT has interviewed nomads and herders who arrived in exile because they were unable to make a sustainable living after the loss of their land or livestock under the new economic programs.

REASONS FOR ESCAPE (III): EDUCATION

The lack of proper education policies encouraging and supporting the study of Tibetan language is also a cause of major frustration for Tibetans and one of the major reasons for seeking refuge in India for many children and adults. Chinese policies and the competitive employment market penalize those who do not know the Chinese language. The national curriculum is taught in Tibetan language medium only in primary schools in Tibet. Beyond primary school, Tibetan language is typically an elective class, and all other subjects are taught in Mandarin Chinese. Children lacking the Chinese language skills needed to understand other subjects in upper grades often fall behind and lose interest in school. Prosperous Tibetan families often send their children to study in China in order to improve



A child's drawing from the Tibetan Refugee Reception Centre in Kathmandu, depicting Chinese soldiers harassing a Tibetan family. Children who escape into exile often draw pictures of everyday life in Tibet depicting a strong military presence in their home country. ICT's Rowell Fund supports an Art Refuge project in the Reception Center in Dharamsala, India, helping children to heal from the trauma of the journey into exile and separation from their families. (Photo: Jonathan Green)

their Chinese language skills and obtain a good degree from a Chinese university. Families with a lower income, who cannot afford school fees, often make the decision to send their children into exile in India so that they can gain a Tibetan education and be close to the Dalai Lama.

Education levels among Tibetans in Tibet are much lower than those of ethnic Han Chinese; based on 2000 census data, the Tibetan rate of illiteracy (47.55%), for instance, is more than five times higher than for the Chinese (8.60%), while Chinese reach senior middle school at more than five times the rate of Tibetans.⁷¹ Over the last decade, approximately 30% of Tibetan refugees were children and students seeking a Tibetan education in exile.

REASONS FOR ESCAPE (IV): POLITICAL REPRESSION

Former political prisoners and those who have been targeted by the state for participating in what the Chinese authorities broadly term 'splittist activities' (attempting to 'split' Tibet from China) are also among those who escape from Tibet every year. Political activism and pro-independence activities are strictly prohibited and heavily penalized according to Chinese laws. Ex-prisoners and political activists face extreme difficulties once released from prison. Nuns and monks are prohibited from returning to their monasteries. Though many among them try to build a new life, the opportunities are scarce and they suffer constant supervision and suspicion. Among those who flee are also many Tibetans who have evaded arrest for political charges. If they returned to Tibet they would face severe punishment. In 2006, three well-known former political prisoners arrived in exile — nuns who had served long sentences in Drapchi prison, Ngawang Rigdrol who served six years, Rigzin Choekyi, who served 12 years, and Lhundrub Zangmo, who served nine years. The latter two women were among a group of nuns, together with Phuntsog Nyidron and Ngawang Sangdrol, whose sentences were extended after they secretly recorded songs about the Dalai Lama and Tibet's future on a tape cassette that was smuggled out of prison and reached the West.⁷²



Chinese soldiers in Lhasa, 2006. (Photo: ICT)

In 2006, ICT reported on the long sentences imposed on several Tibetan monks and nuns for 'splittist offences', including a senior monk, Choeying Khedrub, who was imprisoned in 2001 and is serving a life sentence. Choeying Khedrub, who is in his early thirties, was one of a group of three other monks and two laypeople accused of the printing and distribution of pro-independence leaflets.⁷³ In 2006, the case of a young Tibetan writer and teacher came to the attention of the West. Twenty-nine year old Dolma Kyab smuggled out a letter from prison saying he is serving a ten-year sentence linked to his unpublished book. Dolma Kyab, who is known among his friends for his passionate concern for Tibet's environment, was detained in March 2005 and is being held in Chushur (Chinese: Qushui) prison south-west of Lhasa on charges that appear to be of 'endangering state security'.⁷⁴

ICT collected the following accounts from new arrivals in exile about the reasons for their departure from Tibet. Full details of their identity have been withheld.

DENOUNCING THE DALAI LAMA

A monk in his mid-twenties from the Lhasa area gave the following account of his reasons for escaping from Tibet in 2006.

“I was expelled from my monastery in Tibet during a patriotic education session in the late 1990s; I had studied there for about 10 years. About seven members of a work team and officials from the county and Lhasa area came to conduct a ‘patriotic education’ campaign in our monastery. The session took three months. During this time we were instructed to read and learn by heart a few texts, which mainly had a political meaning. Together with two other friends, I refused to denounce His Holiness the Dalai Lama. We made it very clear to the officials that we would comply with the course of the patriotic education however we cannot denounce our root lama. We also appealed to the officials who conducted the re-education campaign that if we denounce our root lama then the very essence of becoming a monk or following the Buddha Dharma is in vain. Therefore, we said, apart from denouncing His Holiness the Dalai Lama, we could abide by any regulations or adhere to study materials.

However, when the officials talk about ‘separatist forces’ or ‘splittism’, they refer to the Dalai Lama. They consider the Dalai Lama as a threat to the unity of the state. There is no value in becoming a monk when you have no religious freedom or freedom to choose one’s own religious leaders. The Chinese officials are very suspicious of our [monks’] work. We could not keep pictures of the Dalai Lama. Our movements are always watched by informants [in the monastery] and anyone found with such materials is put into prison and will be extensively interrogated.



Plainclothes Public Security Bureau personnel (with pistol) at a monastery in Tibet during a ‘patriotic education’ campaign. (Photo: ICT)

After my expulsion from the monastery, my life has become futile. I needed to get permission from the leaders of township when I go out from my home to county or Lhasa. I couldn’t get re-admission into any monastery in Tibet. I simply stayed at home and spent my time reading books, religious texts and doing household work. My parents are farmers. However, I have no experience of working in the fields.

Life was really hard, as we didn’t enjoy freedom of speech, movement and religious freedom. I couldn’t concentrate on my religious texts because of the fear and insecurity I experienced in my mind. Even my family didn’t support me when I was expelled from the monastery. They feared that the Chinese officials would take action against them if they supported me. So I decided to escape into exile.”

UNDERMINING THE DALAI LAMA IN TIBETAN SCHOOLS

A teenager from central Tibet gave this account of his quest for education:

“I was sent to school in the Lhasa area by my parents, but I came into exile in order to have a good education that includes Tibetan language, culture and the freedom to express my faith in His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The school I went to [in the Lhasa area] was good; it was established by an official in the Tibetan government and there are many students from rural as well as urban areas. The students are taught only Chinese and English but there is no Tibetan subject[s] in the school. There are both Chinese and Tibetan teachers in the school and usually the Tibetan teachers checked the students to see whether we wear the photo of His Holiness the Dalai Lama on our neck. Once there was a Tibetan teacher who checked all the students and, honestly speaking, most of the students are wearing something on their neck and some of them are wearing His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s photo. So the Tibetan teacher found out that one of the students was wearing photo of His Holiness and the teacher grabbed the photo from that student’s neck and threw it into a toilet. So all the students were very angry.

Also, often the school asks the students to write denouncing letter to His Holiness the Dalai Lama and last year all the students discussed this and decided not to write and all the students didn’t write it, but this year again the school asked us to write it and half of the students, especially girl students, wrote the letter, but there were also students including myself, who didn’t write the letter. There was a Chinese teacher who told me to write the letter. He said, ‘You have to write it, otherwise the school will kick you out from the school’ in a very angry and rude way. Now I am thinking of not going back to Tibet at all.”

FROM NANGMA BARS TO A NUN'S VOCATION

A Tibetan woman in her early twenties from a farming family gave ICT this account of why she escaped into exile:

“In my home area, there are so many youngsters who intend to have a good education but then because of the high school fees that they can't pay, they have to leave school. If you can't afford to pay the fee in money you can pay in kind, by giving a certain amount of grain. Still there are lots of kids in our place who can't pay their school fees. The Shang [township] government always says that the parents have to send their children to school and that they will be fined if they don't send their children to school, but then the kids are expelled when they don't pay. Then some of them stay at home to do farm work in the fields while others go to other places like Tsethang (Lhokha prefecture, Chinese: Shannan in the TAR) and Lhasa where they do various jobs. If you are a girl, like in my case, you can find work as a waitress in a restaurant or in Nangma [a bar in a Tibetan city where live music is played by professionals].⁷⁵



A yak caravan taking a rest above Kangchung at the feet of the Nangpa glacier. At least five to six hours still separate the yak traders from Dzasampa where they usually spend the night before crossing the Nangpa Pass into Tibet. (Photo: ICT)

When my sister and I went to primary school, we didn't have any problem in paying the school fees but then when we went to middle school we had to pay higher school fees. My mother is a single mother so she has to take care of both the school fees as well as the household expenses. When we went to the county middle school, my mother had a very hard time in paying for us. The school fee per school term in the county middle school is around 350 to 400 Yuan (\$45–52) and sometimes my mother had to give grain. This always made me sad and I felt pity for her. Although my mother insisted I should continue, I left middle school just before my graduation.

Since I was the oldest in the family I thought I could help my mother to earn some money for my sister's education. First I worked for a Chinese construction company as a labourer carrying bricks and stones on my back, and they paid me 20 yuan (\$2.58) per day and I had to pay for my own food. When I first got the job from this Chinese employer, it was quite fine because I know Chinese language, and so the Chinese boss easily accepted me. If you don't know Chinese however these days in Tibet, then there is no way to get a job, even if you have other experiences and skills. And even if you get a job you have to do the most difficult work and the Chinese always scold you. I worked as a labourer for the Chinese for three months and after that I went to Tsethang and worked in a restaurant as a waitress, which was very hard work and I had to wash up all the dishes.

Then I went back home and told my mother that I wanted to become a nun in Shugseb nunnery. My mother agreed with me and said that I could become a nun. However, if you become a nun you have to pay a lot of money and other things such as butter, meat, Tsampa etc to the nunnery, otherwise the nunnery won't allow you to join. As well as that there are restrictions on the numbers of nuns that are allowed to join the nunnery and you need back door connections in order to join in a nunnery, and we don't know anyone in the government. It is like the nunnery is owned by the government. My mother went to the nunnery and to the [local authorities] many times to ask permission for me to join the nunnery. In the end my mother told me that I had better go to India in order to be a nun.

To raise the money to leave, I worked as a waitress in a Nangma bar called Nyi-hoe Nangma [Sun shine Nangma]. I really didn't like the work that I had to do in the Nangma because I had to serve beer for the costumers. And many different people visit the Nangma bar and if you are working as a waitress in a Nangma bar many people outside [who don't visit Nangma bars] think that you are a prostitute. So I told my mother that I didn't want to continue work in the Nangma anymore. Then luckily, my mother knows someone who was also seeking to go to India. So we came to India together and now I am going to Tibetan Transit School. Although I came here to become a good nun, when I arrived at the Reception Center [in Dharamsala] and told them that I wanted to go to a nunnery, they said I should go to school first. So I don't know what to do in the future and my mother may get upset with me because I am going to school now.⁷⁶ For me I don't have a choice and I can't afford to go back to Tibet because I paid so much money for the guide.”



NEPAL'S SHIFTING NEW ORDER AND CHINA'S INFLUENCE

2006 began with pro-democracy and anti-monarchy uprisings in the streets of Kathmandu against King Gyanendra, who had seized power from the government in February 1, 2005. Weeks of rallies and a mass strike in Kathmandu resulted in violence that left at least 12 dead and 100 injured. On April 24, King Gyanendra agreed to step down and reinstated the Nepalese parliament, which opened for the first time in four years. Girija Prasad Koirala was sworn in as Prime Minister and along with the seven political party alliance (SPA), initiated talks with the Maoists (Communist Party of Nepal — Maoists). Following a formal peace accord and ceasefire, attempts at incorporating the Maoists into the new Nepalese government were on-going at the end of 2006. An interim constitution was approved in December, and assembly elections were due to take place before June 2007.⁷⁷

The changing of the political guard in Kathmandu has brought new opportunities but greater uncertainty for the estimated 20,000 long-staying Tibetan refugees in Nepal and the thousands more who transit through on their way to India.

Although non-interference in each other's internal affairs is an official principle of China-Nepal relations, China exerts significant and unequal influence in Nepal in every aspect of their relationship, both geo-political and economic.

China's acute sensitivity over Tibet continued to be the primary feature of China-Nepal relations in 2006.⁷⁸ During the year, several high-level Chinese delegations visited Kathmandu, including China's State Councillor Tang Jiaxuan in March, and Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei in July, among others.⁷⁹ In military and material assistance as well as in statements by Chinese delegations, China signalled its appreciation to Nepal for "not allowing Tibetans to engage in separatist activities" and for "not permitting outside powers to support such activities on their soil."

In March, the Nepali King, again told the visiting Chinese State Councilor, Tang Jiaxuan, that "Nepal firmly supports the one-China policy of your government and will never allow any anti-China activities in Nepal's territory."⁸⁰ Tang responded, "We highly respect the mode of development chosen by the Nepalese people, have never interfered with the internal affairs of Nepal. We consistently support Nepal in its effort to safeguard sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity" (Xinhua, March 18, 2006).

While most of Nepal's friends focused on the prospects for democracy after King Gyanendra's dissolution of the government in 2005, and for peace as the Maoist insurgency expanded, China was providing "unflinching support... irrespective of whoever sits in power," according to the Nepalese Consul General in Lhasa, Paudyal. Paudyal not only commended China but took the opportunity to register an opinion on religious freedom in Tibet, saying, "I have seen crowds of thousands of religious believers every day circling around the Potala Palace and other temples in Lhasa. Any one visiting Lhasa can see this scene every day in the morning and evening. I can easily infer from such crowd that common people can perform their religious activities according to their belief without trouble" (Xinhuanet, January 6, 2006).

After the King was forced to relinquish direct rule, a Special Advisor on Foreign Affairs to the new Nepal Prime Minister, Dr. Suresh Chandra Chalise, paid a courtesy call on the Vice Minister of the Foreign Department of the Communist Party of China, Liu Hongcai, to reaffirm Nepal's commitment to business as usual with China and reaffirm Nepal's respect for China's claim to Tibet.

Nepal continued to restrict activities of its long-staying Tibetan refugee communities and obstructed a US-proposed Tibetan refugee resettlement program from Nepal. In July 2006, Chinese Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs, Wu Dawei, met with the Nepal Minister for Foreign Affairs, K.P. Oli, in Kathmandu to make known his government's sensitivity about issues related to Tibetans in Nepal and, in particular, the US-proposed Tibetan refugee resettlement program. Oli reportedly provided assurances that Nepal stopped granting Tibetans refugee status in 1989.

China's infrastructure investment in Tibet, including the Golmud-Lhasa railway, was perceived as advantageous by Nepal⁸¹ and economic bonds between the two countries increased in 2006. Nepalese entrepreneurs have invested about US\$8.2 million in Lhasa, according to the Deputy Director for Commerce in the TAR, Zhao Lifu, and business opportunities are growing. Regional experts are heralding a new era of China-Nepal trade and diplomacy based on China's priority for economic development in its western areas, including Tibet.

In 2006, the two countries exempted their citizens, including family members, holding diplomatic or official passports from visa requirements while entering into or transiting through each other's territory for a maximum period of 30 days. Throughout the year, China also continued to prioritise security and surveillance of the Tibet-Nepal border.⁸²

In November, Liu Hongcai, after meeting in Kathmandu with Nepal Minister for Foreign Affairs Oli, responded to a question on the US-proposed Tibetan refugee

resettlement program, saying: “China has core interest in Tibet. Foreign forces trying to play a role of splitting Tibet is unacceptable to China” [sic] (The Himalayan Times, November 24, 2006).

During an ICT visit to Kathmandu in 2006, ICT Vice President Mary Beth Markey noted that one of the most striking developments was the anxiety and fearfulness among many Tibetans living in Kathmandu: “They spoke of China’s heavy footprint in Nepal, Tibetan businessmen being frequently extorted by Maoists, a Tibetan rug factory warehouse being appropriated by the Maoists and used as a People’s Court, and of an ineffectual government and police that provides them little, if any, protection. In short, members of the Tibetan community expressed acute vulnerability and anxiety about their future in Nepal.”



A PERSONAL PILGRIMAGE — HOW A JOURNEY TO THE BORDER GAVE AN INSIGHT INTO THE DANGEROUS CROSSING

Soon after the Nangpa Pass shooting on September 30, a Western researcher and Buddhist made a journey from Kathmandu to the pass where Kelsang Namtso died. The researcher gave an account of his journey to ICT. Names and identifying details have been withheld.

“In making my journey, I wanted to have first-hand experience of what Tibetans face when walking all the way from home, Tibet, and cross the border along the Himalayas to enter a foreign country in the hope for freedom and a chance to see the Dalai Lama. Nothing prepared me for the intense physical and psychological endeavour I was to face on my trek, which became a pilgrimage. Probably it was more of a personal tribute and homage to those Tibetans who risked and still risk their lives in their attempt to cross the border to escape Chinese oppression.

Accompanied by a Tibetan ex-yak herder turned farmer, I set off what it turned to be a five-day long heavy trek beginning with a half-day hike uphill from the Lukla airstrip, a 45-minute flight from Kathmandu. I had been in Tibet a few times but never had I been exposed to such a breathtaking array of glaciers and dramatic moonscapes. Under a baking sun and constantly whipped by a skin-cracking wind we covered a distance of nearly 40 km in just two and a half days. In various occasions we encountered small yak caravans of Tibetan traders and herders coming from Dingri and Pheruk and heading to Namche Bazaar to sell their goods at the local market.

On arrival in Namche Bazaar, I took a rest to drink sweet milk tea in a Tibetan shop. A young Tibetan man, poorly dressed and slightly emaciated, came in to tell us how he and a group of Tibetans crossed the border the day before and just arrived in town. The guide had dropped them off just a mile before the Nangpa Pass. We



Deep snow and ice crevasses surround the glaciers along the route to and from the Nangpa Pass especially around Mount Cho Oyu. (Photo: ICT)

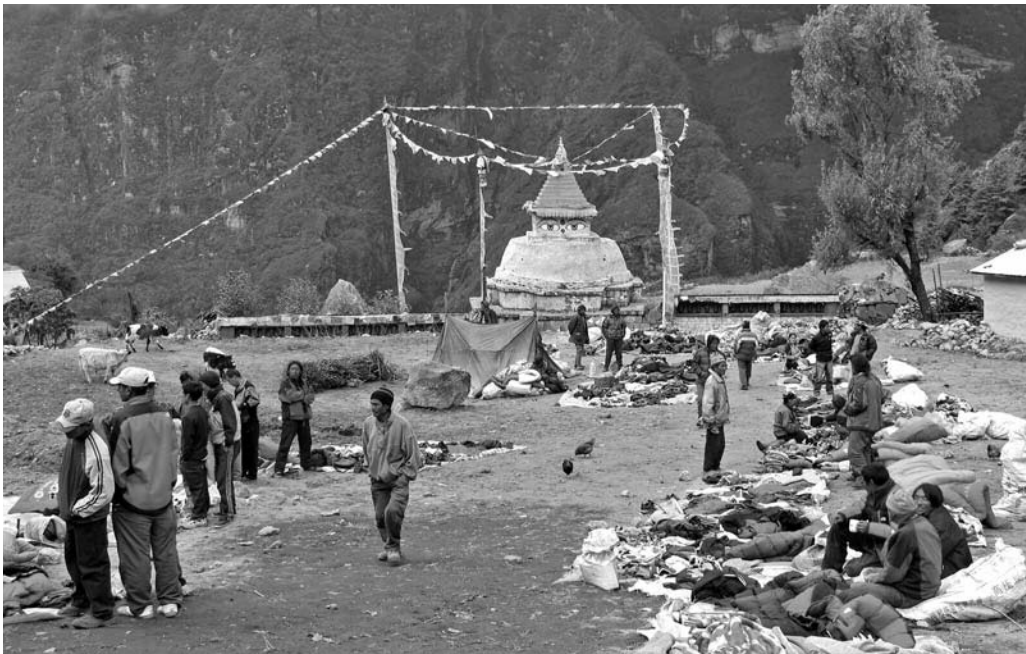
followed the young Tibetan to a private house where the group found shelter.⁸³ There were two children in the group and two nuns, all eating a pack of dry instant noodles. They too, like most of the other members of the group were poorly equipped. One kid had a broken shoe and I could see his thin socks. Most of the Tibetans were from Amdo and a few from Kham.⁸⁴ The average age was 18 and all told us they wanted to meet the Dalai Lama and study in India.

I found it difficult to imagine how parents could send their children on



Although multiple caravans of Tibetan yak herders cross the border every year, the majority of Tibetans fleeing their country encounter extreme difficulties in their attempt to cross the pass mainly because they are unprepared for the task, poorly equipped, and unaware of the toughness of the enterprise. (Photo: ICT)

According to bilateral agreements regarding border policy between Tibet and Nepal, Tibetan traders are allowed to cross the border and reach Namche Bazar, in Nepal's Solu Khumbu region. A weekly and often daily Tibetan market takes place in Namche Bazar where many Tibetan merchants sell their products — both Tibetan dairy and produce as well as clothing and cheap Chinese consumer goods brought in from the markets of Shigatse and Lhasa in the TAR. (Photo: ICT)



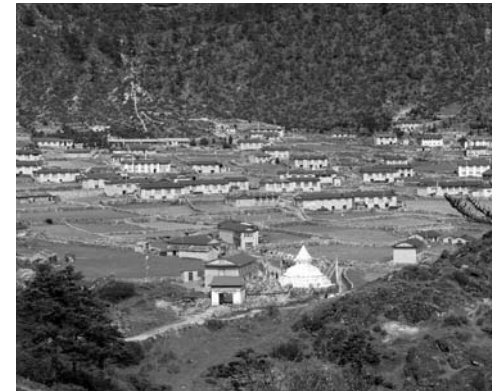
such a hard and dangerous trip, but I soon realised that most Tibetans simply have no idea about the distance, duration and conditions of the journey. Even worse, they don't know that there is a significant chance that they will never make it to the other side of the border, due to the risks of capture.

Later, we met an old lady on her way into exile. Although most of the time Tibetans travel in groups, some make their way individually. Poorly equipped and almost snow-blinded, she was 72 years old. She had set off alone, but after a few days of walking she had the chance to join a group of traders heading to Khumbu. She met them a few miles past the Chinese army garrison of Tragmar.⁸⁵ The old woman told me that her dream was to meet His Holiness the Dalai Lama in India. She said she had no relatives left in Tibet, and only wanted to see His Holiness — after she had seen him, she could die in peace. She told me she had a bad headache and pain in her knees. The only thing I could do was give her some pills of Ibuprofen and Tylenol for the pain so that she might reach Namche Bazaar.

As we walked higher and higher I was astounded at the hardship of such a trek. Even yaks have difficulty along the trail. As I was fairly acclimatized, I didn't experience any major symptoms of acute mountain sickness. However, I suffered intense exhaustion and lack of appetite. I realised that there is no clear pathway and that the whole track snakes over stones, passing over boulders, and near cliffs. One moment I was fording a little



Most Tibetans make the arduous journey into exile without enough food, and with thin, inadequate clothing. This Tibetan child had just arrived in Nepal after crossing the Nangpa Pass, wearing these shoes. (Photo: Jonathan Green)



The small town of Kunde (12,435 ft.; 3,790m.), north of Namche Bazar, is home to the Kunde Hospital (here on the top left side with a grey tin roof). (Photo: ICT)



At a height of 11,286 ft. (3,440 mt.) Namche Bazaar is the gateway to the Himalaya and the highest trading and police check post of the Khumbu region in Nepal. After crossing the border at the Nangpa Pass (18,835 ft.; 5,741 mt.) Tibetans on their way to Kathmandu are likely to spend at least a night in Namche Bazaar. Here they have their first opportunity to contact the TRRC and ask for assistance. (Photo: ICT)

stream, the next I was sliding over a gravel slope, and next I was climbing a dangerous ice hill. The Tibetan caravan was ahead of me and my guide and it was clear to me that there was no way we could possibly catch up with them. They do this trip twice if not more each year.

It took nearly three hours to reach the Nangpa Pass in an icy wind and a brutally bright sun from the ice covered Dzasampa [a huge outcrop of rock and ice flat on the glacier where Tibetan yak herders and trekkers usually camp before continuing the trek over the pass]⁸⁶ where we had stayed the previous night, after three exhausting days walking from dawn to dusk. I can scarcely imagine how ill-equipped children, wearing just sneakers and thin jackets, make this journey. The area is permanently covered in thick ice and there were visible crevasses. At the top of the

pass, the solitary mast was hidden by a huge mass of Tibetan prayer flags. We could see straight into Tibet from the top of the pass, on the Nepal side.

I felt a compelling urge to visit the place where Kelsang Namtso died, as a personal pilgrimage. It was a risk of course — even for a foreigner, although the worst that could probably happen to me was that I would be fined for illegally crossing the border. It took an additional half an hour to reach the spot on the pass, on the Tibet side. My guide, who knew the area intimately, pointed out the area where Kelsang Namtso had been shot dead. Across the snow was the slope where the Chinese fired at the Tibetans, and beyond the moraine, there were some tents at advance base camp on Mount Cho Oyu. I left a Tibetan khata [white silk scarf] there in the snow, for her.”



Taken a few weeks after the September 30 incident, this photo shows the area of rock and ice known as Dzabowa, where the 17 year old nun Kelsang Namtso was shot and killed attempting to reach the border. This image is taken looking towards Cho Oyu advance base camp. (Photo: ICT)



AN AUDIENCE WITH THE DALAI LAMA FOR NEW ARRIVALS

New arrivals to India are given the opportunity for an audience with the Dalai Lama following their journey into exile. ICT was present during one of these audiences in December 2006 in Dharamsala at the Tsuglakhang temple near His Holiness' residence. The room was silent as the Dalai Lama spoke, but for an occasional muffled sob from the Tibetan gathering. There was a large number of monks from Tibet in the audience, and some were planning to go back to Tibet. The following is an edited version of the Dalai Lama's address to the Tibetans, translated and paraphrased from Tibetan while the Dalai Lama was speaking, which began with comments on how Tibetans should be proud of their spiritual and cultural heritage. He went on to mention to the group a meeting he had with Mao after the Chinese invasion in the 1950s:

"I met Mao several times during my visits to China — once he told me that he had only sent the Chinese to Tibet to develop Tibet, and once that was achieved they would withdraw. Mao talked about the greatness of Tibet in past history. He said that once it reached that stage of development, they [the Chinese] would leave. Maybe Mao was joking with me but maybe not. I remember one official at that time who was always talking about the PRC, and he used to say that this stands for the People's United Republic of China. But now the Chinese don't really put an emphasis on unity. It seems that [they] are more interested in economic power. Although the Party is Communist in fact the government is capitalist. Before, the Chinese always had a clear objective, they were to be a classless society. But the idea of a revolutionary society is now completely gone. Now the leadership is interested in power. They don't really think about the long-term future. So it seems now that you can't really find genuine Communism in China.

It can probably benefit Tibetans in terms of economic development to remain in the PRC. If we are able to get genuine economic development. If we are able to achieve a strong unity in Tibet that it is also in China's interest as well as ours. There will be peace, there will be stability. If inside someone is not happy then it is difficult to achieve genuine peace. It's our duty to achieve a meaningful autonomy.

Now you need to establish yourselves in exile. When you return to Tibet, share with your fellow Tibetans what you have seen. Only share with those people you trust. It is important to be truthful and honest. It is important for you to know what we have done in exile. An important area to stress is that of education. Monasteries and nunneries are not necessarily important — what is important is the study

of religion and general improvement of education for the younger people here. It is important for you to use your intelligence to strive for a better education. A modern education is important and still closely linked to our culture and the Tibetan Buddhist culture. It is very important to have this as it will help the Tibetans to help solve the problems they face today. Without modern education and science it is very difficult for Tibetans to face competition from the Chinese. Since we first came into exile in the '60s, we have known the importance of a good modern education.

You cannot be a true Tibetan if you don't understand your Tibetan culture — your traditional Tibetan values. For the older generation, it is important to be aware of what is happening to our culture. Especially for Tibetans who live in rural areas and who face problems in the villages, you have to be alert and aware [of opportunities to address these problems]. Slowly China [the Chinese people] is beginning to see the [importance of the] rule of law. For China to join the global community is very important. I [recently] met three people who came from Tibet, when they had problems with [the authorities], the legal system allowed them to address their grievances. You should persevere with this, whatever the difficulties. Whether it is about looking after the environment or setting up schools, if there is an opportunity to address your grievances, then do so.

For the monks among you, if you have joined a monastery here you should follow the discipline of the monastery and study hard."



His Holiness the Dalai Lama addresses an audience of new arrivals in December 2006 in Dharamsala, India. (Photo: Tenzin Choejor, with thanks to the Private Office of the Dalai Lama)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations to UNHCR:

1. Post UNHCR protection officers in border regions to educate local authorities in the proper treatment of refugees, monitor adherence to the policy of non-refoulement by immigration and local security forces, and intervene when refoulement and/or abuse occurs. In those areas where posting of UNHCR staff is not possible, conduct regular monitoring missions.
2. Respond without delay to assist new refugees in border regions to ensure their safe transit to the TRRC.
3. Urge the Nepalese government to adhere to the principles of non-refoulement by taking the adequate policy and administrative steps which include written policy instruction to all border immigration and police, and training of Nepalese police, security forces and immigration authorities in proper procedures and international human rights standards and practices.
4. Lodge a formal protest with the Nepal government against any effort to rescind the registration of the Bhota Welfare Society.

Recommendations to the Nepal government:

1. Systematically issue Refugee Certificates (RC) to all Tibetan refugees who have entered Nepal before December 31, 1989, and their eligible off-spring.
2. Expeditiously reinstate the issuance of travel permits to Tibetan refugees.
3. Respect the government established system for providing protection to refugees, in the spirit of the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 protocol, including protection against refoulement.
4. Cooperate with the office of the UNHCR in Kathmandu, NGOs, and foreign governments sympathetic to Tibetan issues in assisting refugees.

Recommendations to the US, EU and other foreign governments:

1. Continue to provide funding to the UNHCR for the operation of the TRRC.
2. Make known the displeasure of your government to the Nepal government regarding efforts to rescind the registration of the Bhota Welfare Society.
3. Direct human rights monitors at embassies to interview new arrivals from Tibet about conditions in border areas and in Tibet.
4. Work multilaterally to urge the Nepal government to implement a formal protection policy for refugees, and to cooperate with the UNHCR and NGOs on refugee issues, including training of border police and immigration officials.
5. Press the government of the People's Republic of China to investigate the September 30 shooting and provide a full accounting for those Tibetans apprehended, especially the children, who may still be in custody.

APPENDIX I

The official Chinese account of the Nangpa shooting

Lhasa, Oct. 12 (Xinhua) — Nearly 70 people attempted to illegally cross the border between China and Nepal in the TAR on the early morning of Sept. 30 and one died during a conflict with border control guards, said an official of the related department of the region Thursday.

The official said a small squad of Chinese frontier soldiers found the stowaways and tried to persuade them to go back to their home. But the stowaways refused and attacked the soldiers.

Under the circumstances, “the frontier soldiers were forced to defend themselves and injured two stowaways,” said the source.

One injured person died later in hospital due to oxygen shortage on the 6,200-meter high land, while another injured person received treatment in the local hospital.

Preliminary interrogations showed that it was a large-scale and premeditated illegal stowaway case. Further investigations into the case are underway.

APPENDIX II

The impact on the climbing community

In the media interest following the shooting, several specialist climbing and adventure magazines, explored the ethical issues that had been raised for the climbing community. An editorial in the March 2007 issue of *The Alpinist* by Katie Ives describes how many narratives of those who kept climbing after the shooting “display a profound sense of dissonance. After the incident, Farmer [Lee Farmer, from Australia] became completely focused on getting to Camp I safely; once there, however, as he struggled to fall asleep, he couldn’t stop turning over the image of the dead body in his mind... Slovenian alpinist Pavle Kozjek, who began a new route on Cho Oyu the day after the killing, was used to focusing on the moment. On his way down, however, he felt ‘a strange, new emotion’: the climbing had been, as it always was, an ‘upgrade of life.’ At the same time, he’d just witnessed the worst event imaginable — the murder of an unarmed human being.” Ives concludes that Kelsang Namtso’s death “embodies our obligation to our fellow humans. Without it, even our greatest feats, in the most radiant settings, reveal only emptiness and night.” (www.alpinist.com)⁸⁷

The news of the shooting on the Nangpa Pass was first published on Explorers Web (www.mounteverest.net), a website that publishes independent, non-commercial guides and news on mountaineering, ocean sailing, and polar treks. Enclosed is an account from the website posted in January 2007.

... But Himalaya was not ready with us just yet. Little did we know the world’s tallest mountain range had another moral drama up its sleeve. This time it arrived from a neighboring peak to Everest, in an email sent on October 2. The message so explosive we only decided to publish it because we trusted the source, an American commercial guide.

“There is a story that happened here on the 30th and the 1st that is not being told,” wrote the climber. “It is tragic, it is haunting, and it is apparently all too real for Tibetans.” The climber reported that in the middle of the Cho Oyu massive summit push, a group of Tibetans had been shot at on their way across the Nangpa La pass, at Nepal’s borderline.

At least one refugee lay dead in the snow, and ABC was swarmed by Chinese army after the shootout. Out of hundreds of climbers and satellite phones — this was the only report about the incident. Another climber, a doctor, had called his local media who chose not to publish. The news was only at ExplorersWeb.

A day passed by, and an all too familiar silence wrapped Himalaya. An email to ExWeb requested the very next day, “Please retract the story, some commercial expedition leaders say the shot were not refugees but human traffickers.”

There was no news elsewhere about the incident. China denied anything had happened at all. But on October 5 at last, the International Campaign for Tibet organization released a full report stating that something had, indeed, happened.

A very young Tibetan nun was shot dead by Chinese border patrols while on her way into exile in Nepal. Out of 70 refugees, most kids and young monks in their twenties and thirties, 43 were able to escape from the gun-fire but the whereabouts of the more than 30 remaining, including children, was not known.

Slowly, details trickled out. The organization spoke to a British mountain guide and police officer, who said that climbers had witnessed one of the Tibetans getting up after they had fallen, indicating that one of the two might have survived. The guide also said that up to 60 climbers at ABC probably witnessed the incident. “They could see Chinese soldiers quite close to Advance Base Camp kneeling, taking aim and shooting, again and again, at the group, who were completely defenseless,” he said.

... With the increasing number of eye-witness reports, the Chinese turned around and claimed self defense: The refugees had attacked them, they said.

The best thing that happened on ExplorersWeb in 2006

“We need pictures,” wrote ExplorersWeb in a call to the climbers.

“Hi, my name is Pavle Kozjek, from Slovenia, and I just returned from Cho Oyu,” came a reply the very next day. Among hundreds of climbers on Cho Oyu, Pavle was the only one to choose a road less traveled; he had made a new route on the 8000er. But his email was not about that. “I have some photos from 30.9,” Pavle wrote, attaching images...

For once, a young Tibetan nun’s death had not passed by unnoticed — and her justice was made by climbers.

The best thing that happened on ExplorersWeb this year was therefore not a feat, and not a name. The Best of ExplorersWeb in 2006, was the coming out of truth on Nangpa La.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ The principle of non-refoulement is enshrined in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.
- ² Different observers gave different accounts of the number of Tibetans they saw before the shooting began, but most interviewed by ICT reported that they saw around 20-30 Tibetans in the group being fired upon. These Tibetans were part of a larger group of more than 70 escaping into exile. The Tibetans appeared to be in two groups coming across the pass.
- ³ Interview with Steve Lawes, British police officer, by ICT. An American climber and expedition leader said: "You could definitely tell that some were children — they were moving more slowly, we knew those were the ones who would have difficulty getting away."
- ⁴ Accounts of the exact time of the incident varied. Virtually all of the climbers said that the sun was up and it was around "breakfast-time"; some admitted that it was easy to lose track of time when in the mountains and others said that they still had their watches set to Nepali or other time. The GPS coordinates of the area obtained by one climber were as follows: N 28 07.821 and E 086 35.988
- ⁵ Accounts differed as to the exact number of climbers, Sherpas, porters and staff at advance base camp at the time of the shooting. Several of the climbers interviewed by ICT who were at advance base camp at the time were suffering from ill-health due to altitude, or were not making the attempt on the summit for other reasons. Their colleagues who were summiting Cho Oyu at the time did not witness the shooting, but heard about it afterwards. For instance, the Romanian cameraman Sergiu Matei, who filmed the shooting, was suffering from pulmonary oedema and so had come down to a lower altitude after attempting to climb higher earlier. Dr Ted Esguerra from the Philippines had remained at advance base camp to tend a sick European climber.
- ⁶ At the point when they were fired upon, the group of Tibetans were approximately 15 to 20 minutes walk away from the border with Nepal.
- ⁷ Other climbers, including a Danish doctor, Pierre Maina, saw soldiers shooting from a standing position as well as taking aim while kneeling down.
- ⁸ A European climber who did not want to be identified said: "They were pretty scattered around, but they reformed groups. There was one group scattered on the edge of the moraine and one group at ABC [advance base camp] at the same time."
- ⁹ Tibetans in the group confirmed the presence of at least five soldiers in the vicinity of advance base camp firing upon the Tibetans. One monk from the group said: "Some people from our group saw seven soldiers but I only saw five."
- ¹⁰ Sergiu Matei, who served in the army in Romania, said: "I have a picture of one of the Chinese soldiers holding a Type-81 in his hands, exactly like an AK-47, the only difference is the aiming site at the back of the barrel of the weapon. Another one holds another type of Kalashnikov, one with a barrel underneath."
- ¹¹ Steve Lawes, the British police officer interviewed by ICT.
- ¹² The American climber commented: "The [soldiers] were very young guys, not very experienced, some of them only about 19 or 20 years old. Most of the climbers tried to keep a distance and the atmosphere was very tense."
- ¹³ When asked whether he had been filmed or not by Chinese security personnel, one climber told ICT: "No, I filmed them." Another climber said that they had been filming climbers at intermediate base camp, lower down, but not at advance base camp as far as he knew.
- ¹⁴ There are two chains of command for People's Armed Police. The Armed Police is

simultaneously under the command of the CCP's Central Military Committee and the State Council. The armed police force headquarters falls under the direct jurisdiction of the government Ministry of Public Security, under Minister Zhou Yongkang, a former Party Secretary of Sichuan province.

- ¹⁵ Sergiu filmed the incident for just over 20 minutes. An edited version of his footage was broadcast all over the world by the television company he is employed by, ProTV in Bucharest, Romania, and APTV, and uploaded onto YouTube — http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zom8pYZ1O_4
- ¹⁶ The interviewee was helped to escape by one of the climbers, the Romanian cameraman Sergiu Matei.
- ¹⁷ The same young Tibetan man who was rescued by the Romanian climber told ICT that he was looking after six children on the journey before the shooting began and he became separated from the group. "Those children did not have any food [with them] so we had to feed them all the time," he said. "They had no tsampa [roasted barley flour, a Tibetan staple] to bring with them for the journey. Also they did not have bowls. Those children needed to be given tea and tsampa. All those children were below 12 years old, they were small." The interviewee is now attending school in India.
- ¹⁸ One source mentioned that this fine was 500 yuan (\$64).
- ¹⁹ Dr Pierre Maina, at advance base camp at the time, did refer to the increased dangers of a wound at such a high altitude: "When you have a wound that is bleeding and you lose blood, your heart must pump even harder and at that altitude you have a faster heart rate anyway. Because of the pain this puts greater pressure on your heart and respiration, making you even weaker and thus intensifying the risk of the injury."
- ²⁰ At least one of the climbers observed that one would have to be 'superman' to run fast at that altitude.
- ²¹ Several climbers observed that the regular soldiers were not wearing strong boots suitable for the conditions, but that most were wearing white tennis shoes or trainers, as shown in the images.
- ²² The British climber Steve Lawes reported the same.
- ²³ One climber told ICT: "It wouldn't have surprised me if there were more, because the shooting went on for so long and the Tibetans were such easy targets and couldn't move fast enough."
- ²⁴ Response given to a European government in December/ January 2007.
- ²⁵ Dr Pierre Maina was one of the climbers who witnessed this, and Sergiu Matei was among at least two witnesses who estimated there were three officials checking the body after the shooting.
- ²⁶ One climber was typical in his comment to ICT afterwards: "I just didn't have the guts to do it, as the soldiers were still around." Another said: "I still feel ashamed that I didn't do something."
- ²⁷ There were fewer eyewitnesses to the disposal of the nun's body, as many of the climbers who witnessed the shooting had left advance base camp to make an attempt on the summit. Several said that they questioned whether to continue with their climb or not after witnessing the shooting, but some eyewitnesses later told The Alpinist magazine (www.alpinist.com) that they believed relinquishing their ascents wouldn't have accomplished anything.
- ²⁸ The British climber who took the images admitted to being baffled as to the behavior of the officials at this point: "It looked as though he was sun-bathing," he said. "It was bizarre given the circumstances."

²⁹ Dr Maina admitted that it may not have been a red blanket around the nun — he saw a red color, but acknowledged that it might have been some sort of body bag. Sergiu Matei commented: “In my view it is a big graveyard without crosses down there in that glacier. Tibetans have been fleeing for 50 years and there are not always climbers to witness what happens.”

³⁰ The nun is now in exile, and this information was given to ICT’s field team in January 2007.

³¹ Matei is a professional cameraman for Romanian television.

³² Yartsa Gunbu (*cordyceps sinensis*) is mostly collected by Tibetan nomads and farmers who still make their living in traditional ways, although it is becoming increasingly commercialized, and there are concerns about the sustainability of the trade — it has become an increasingly important means of sustaining a livelihood for many. Environmental consultant Daniel Winkler, an expert on caterpillar fungus, explains its appeal as follows: “In Traditional Chinese Medicine, *cordyceps sinensis* is regarded as a powerful remedy for asthma and TB [tuberculosis], and thus was rumored to help against SARS. However, its main lure is its tonic function, to speed up convalescence, prevent sickness, and boost the immune system and vitality. Of course, anything that boosts vitality will boost libido as well, which in turn attracts the segment of consumers with the most disposable income, namely men over 40. Many Tibetans perceive the *cordyceps*’ Viagra-like function as the main reason why the Chinese are paying a fortune for these caterpillars. When I asked some Tibetan men in Lihang if they use some of the Bu they gather, I was answered with laughter. “We don’t need to take that!” (‘Infested by the Caterpillar Fungus (*Cordyceps sinensis*): A Tibetan once in a lifetime experience,’ Published in: Mushroom — The Journal of Wild Mushrooming, Issue 89 Vol. 24.2, 2006, p.7-12, at <http://www.danielwinkler.com/>.)

³³ In January 2002, the Dalai Lama had to cancel a major religious ceremony in Bodh Gaya, India, due to stomach illness. News spread quickly to Tibet and Tibetans in the Kardze area were so concerned that they took the dangerous step of organizing traditional religious ceremonies to pray for the Dalai Lama’s long life. Residents from as many as 50 villages joined together to hold the ceremonies and video footage was taken and secretly distributed later. At least 20 detentions relating to the ceremonies were made in the area and there was a security crackdown as a result. Further details in ICT’s report, ‘When the Sky fell to Earth: The New Crackdown on Buddhism in Tibet’, 2004, available for downloading at www.savetibet.org

³⁴ Other accounts state that there were 77 people in the group — an exact number could not be confirmed, but it is likely to be between 73 and 77.

³⁵ Not her real name.

³⁶ Almost all of the Tibetans in the group interviewed by ICT said that the guides had told them the journey would be shorter than it actually was, and had also told them to take less food than they actually needed. They also said that the guides had told them the group would be smaller than it was.

³⁷ Advance base camp of Cho Oyu.

³⁸ Other Tibetans from the group confirmed that at least 20 members of the original group of more than 70 Tibetans who left Lhasa had gone missing before the shooting began.

³⁹ The nun’s friend told ICT that at first she couldn’t move because she was so frightened: “I was very afraid and crying because of the fear. My friend pushed me from behind so I ran.”

⁴⁰ This was Kalsang Namgyal, who was photographed by climbers with a wound on his leg after the shooting, when he was taken into custody.

⁴¹ These are the children who were taken into custody by the Chinese soldiers and seen by

the foreign climbers at advance base camp, Mt Cho Oyu.

⁴² The monk later identified both children in one of the photographs of the children in custody taken by the mountaineers.

⁴³ The monk confirmed reports from the nuns who saw Kelsang Namtso’s body that she was shot on her left side, saying: “There were five nuns walking together through the snow and she was in the middle of the line. So the shooting was coming from this side [pointing at his left side].”

⁴⁴ This appears to indicate that it was not only Chinese soldiers who carried out the shooting.

⁴⁵ This does not include two guides who also arrived in Nepal.

⁴⁶ The entire Nangpa Pass group had an audience with the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala on arrival in India.

⁴⁷ In Tibet today, the teaching medium for most primary schools is still Tibetan, but from middle school onwards, the language medium is mainly Chinese. This means that often Tibetan students do fall behind. Often parents want to send their children to Chinese schools so that they can compete in the job market after they qualify. But even this does not guarantee work afterwards, due to increasing competition from a better educated and more skilled Chinese labor force — and also due to an increasingly Chinese-dominated job market that favors Chinese labor.

⁴⁸ ExplorersWeb named ‘The Truth of Nangpa La’ as the ‘Best of ExplorersWeb’ in 2006. See Appendix II.

⁴⁹ The outfitter told The Alpinist: “I hope that climbers will always speak out about what they see around them.” (The Alpinist, March 2007, www.alpinist.com)

⁵⁰ The American climber, and Dr Teofredo T Esguerra, a physician and assistant expedition leader from the Philippines. Dr Esguerra told ICT that he witnessed the shooting because he was in advance base camp tending to a sick Spanish climber. He gave an emotional interview from Cho Oyu to a newspaper in the Philippines.

⁵¹ The Czech climbers added: “This was a very significant show of the Chinese status quo for human rights in Tibet territory. Unfortunately they kill Tibetans at a time when the world is preparing for the Olympic Games in China. For me it’s an unforgivable attack to the indigenous people who will focus on these Games, when the world should celebrate peace.”

⁵² It was later downloaded onto YouTube, the popular video-sharing website <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1C-EXv1A18&mode=related&search=Moises+Naim>, editor in chief of Foreign Policy magazine, drew attention to the importance of the footage in an article published in January/February 2007 (www.foreignpolicy.com): “Fifteen years ago, the world marveled at the fabled “CNN effect.” The expectation was that the unblinking eyes of TV cameras, beyond the reach of censors, would bring greater accountability and transparency to governments and the international system. These expectations were, in some sense, fulfilled. Since the early 1990s, electoral frauds that might have remained hidden were exposed, democratic uprisings energized, famines contained, and wars started or stopped, thanks to the CNN effect. But the YouTube effect will be even more intense. Although the BBC, CNN, and other international news operations employ thousands of professional journalists, they will never be as omnipresent as millions of people carrying a cell phone that can record video. Thanks to their ubiquity, the world was able to witness a shooting on a 19,000-foot mountain pass.”

⁵³ Columbia University Tibetologist Dr. Robert Barnett compared the statement to the position of the Chinese authorities following killings in Lhasa in 1987 during a demon-

stration — in which it was maintained that the police had not opened fire at all. Dr Barnett points out that in January 1988, the Chinese government wrote to the United Nations that on October 1, 1987, Tibetan demonstrators had “snatched guns from public security officers and fired into the crowd. Six people had been killed as a result. The public security officers neither fired nor counter-fired” (letter of the government of the PRC to Professor Amos Wako, the UN Special Rapporteur on Summary and Arbitrary Executions, cited in ‘Report of the Special Rapporteur on Summary and Arbitrary Executions’, E/CN.4/1988/22 (19th January 1988), paragraph 82.) This claim was refuted by independent reports, as well as photographs of Chinese police firing into the crowd. Later the Chinese authorities changed their position and admitted that Chinese police had been “forced to... fire into the air”. Tibetans later made the black joke that the bullets must have bounced off the clouds.

⁵⁴ At the time of writing, it was likely that the EU would put the Nangpa shooting at the top of its human rights agenda with China for the next session of EU-China Human Rights dialogue in May 2007.

⁵⁵ The interviewee could not recollect exactly how long the shooting lasted. She remembered that the soldiers were wearing ‘green uniforms’ and that ‘one of them had a pistol and the others had long arms’ — the latter was probably a reference to the long, narrow barrels of assault rifles. A monk from the group who apparently managed to hide from the shooting was found and detained a few days later. When he was taken into custody he apparently could not walk properly due to an injury sustained when he fell while trying to escape. Others from the group of more than 50 Tibetans were captured later as they continued to try to escape. Both nuns from the group said that they were shocked by the shooting as they had never heard of it happening before. They believed that it could possibly have been because of the large size of the group making the escape attempt.

⁵⁶ According to the UNHCR Global Report for Nepal in 2004 there were 20,700 “persons of concern” of Tibetan origin in the country. See UNHCR Global Report for 2004 — Nepal, p. 2. For a electronic version see <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/open-doc.pdf?tbl=PUBL&id=42ad4da50&page=home>.

⁵⁷ For the ICT report on the 2003 refoulement incident see *Dangerous Crossing 2003*, available to download from www.savetibet.org

⁵⁸ This total is likely to include some passport-holders.

⁵⁹ In December, 2006, the India exit permit policy changed. The change is not expected to have any impact on the transit of Tibetans through Nepal, nor on the issuance of Special Entry Permits (SEPs) to Tibetans. In recent years, increasing numbers of Tibetans with family members in western countries have traveled from Tibet through Nepal, entering India with SEPs. They were then able to pick up western travel documents (or ICRC travel documents) in New Delhi, issued for family reunification. On the basis of the SEP (which demonstrated that they had entered India legally, and hence should not be subject to immigration penalties) they were then issued exit permits by the Indian authorities. This will no longer be possible — Tibetans will now have to enter India with the SEP, then apply for a Residence Certificate, which allows residence in India. Once they have this, they will be able to apply for an Indian ‘Identity Certificate’, which is a travel document for non-nationals. Finally, they will be able to depart India on the Identity Certificate — which does not require an exit permit. Timeframe estimates are one to three years, versus nearly immediate departure at present. According to UNHCR in Kathmandu, while the new rules pose no threat to transit through Nepal, family reunification via India will now take much longer. A statement issued by the Tibetan exile Kashag (government) on September 20,

2006, explained the ruling as follows: “As the number of such people [applying for Exit Permits] kept steadily increasing, the Indian Government found it uncomfortable with this situation. They feel that some Tibetans are using India as a conduit or passage to travel abroad and therefore, expressed its inability to issue Exit Permits to such people effective from December 31, 2006.”

⁶⁰ This trend has been more noticeable since Nepal was designated by China as a tourist destination in 2002.

⁶¹ Sometimes this applied even to Tibetans with official papers. A Tibetan who had official travel documents from the Chinese embassy in India to see his family in Tibet told ICT that when he arrived in summer 2006, he was detained on arrival and held overnight in Shigatse, the TAR. He was then allowed to go to his family — but detained again, and held in custody for three months. He told ICT that he was beaten for refusing to answer certain questions. His interrogators asked him how often he had seen the Dalai Lama, and enquired about officials from the Tibetan exile government.

⁶² He was also told that he would receive a prison sentence if he tried to escape into exile again.

⁶³ A sum of 100 yuan (\$13) was quoted for helping police to apprehend a Tibetan escaping into exile. The same source suggested that for doing this full-time, some people were paid 3000 Yuan (\$387) per month, although this could not be confirmed.

⁶⁴ Likely to be assault rifles, copies of AK-47s, with an automatic capacity.

⁶⁵ The prison where the nuns and monks were held was likely to be the so-called ‘Snowland New Reception Center’, which was opened in Shigatse in 2003 specifically to receive Tibetans caught attempting to escape to or returning illegally from Nepal or India.

⁶⁶ For further information on religious repression see the ICT report ‘When the Sky fell to Earth: The New Crackdown on Buddhism in Tibet’ available to download from ICT’s website at <http://www.savetibet.org/documents/document.php?id=37>

⁶⁷ ICT report, ‘Tibetans banned from marking traditional Buddhist anniversary’, January 9, 2007, <http://www.savetibet.org/news/newsitem.php?id=1077>

⁶⁸ See ICT report, ‘Monks imprisoned for discussing lack of freedom in Tibet’, November 8, 2006 <http://www.savetibet.org/news/newsitem.php?id=1057>

⁶⁹ ‘Xibu da kaifa’ is mostly commonly translated into English as the ‘Great development of the West’. The word ‘kaifa’, however, is more accurately translated from the Chinese as ‘exploitation’.

⁷⁰ See ICT report, Political repression intensifies as Tibet railway opens, June 30, 2006 <http://www.savetibet.org/news/newsitem.php?id=997>

⁷¹ See the Congressional-Executive Commission on China Annual Report 2006, available for downloading at www.cecc.gov

⁷² See ICT report, Two ‘singing nuns’ arrive in exile after escape from Tibet, May 26, 2006 at <http://www.savetibet.org/news/newsitem.php?id=982>

⁷³ ICT report, Long sentences for Tibetan political prisoners for ‘splittist’ offences, May 12, 2006, <http://www.savetibet.org/news/newsitem.php?id=971>

⁷⁴ ICT report, Tibetan scholar sentenced to ten years in prison after writing book on history and culture, August 8, 2006, <http://www.savetibet.org/news/newsitem.php?id=1013>

⁷⁵ ‘Nang-ma’ is a genre of Tibetan songs from the Lhasa region, accompanied by the instruments Tibetan banjo (dranyen), flute (lingbu), fiddle (piwang) and dulcimer (yangchin).

⁷⁶ This experience is shared by other Tibetan women who arrive in exile either as nuns or wanting to be nuns.

⁷⁷ On November 28, 2006, the Nepali Army and Maoists agreed to an arms management pact, under which each side would put away most of its weapons and restrict most troops

to a few barracks, under the supervision of UN monitors. Human Rights Watch was among international organizations welcoming the November 21 agreement that, if implemented, could end a war that has killed an estimated 13,000 people since it began in 1996, but cautioned that an end to impunity must be at the top of the political agenda — http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/12/01/nepal14727_txt.htm.

⁷⁸ A senior western government official in Kathmandu told ICT staff in October that China's brief in the Nepal capital was almost entirely devoted to Tibet.

⁷⁹ The latter visit was the third official Chinese delegation to Kathmandu in four months, noted by both the Indian and Nepalese press.

⁸⁰ During the year, the Nepalese authorities also reiterated their commitment “to support China over the issue of Taiwan and Tibet” (Nepalnews Mar 17 06).

⁸¹ Chinese ambassador to Nepal Sun Heping stated at a meeting in Kathmandu on July 14, 2006, that the railway provided a “historic opportunity” to further promote trade between Nepal and China (Kathmandu Post, July 14, 2006). The Post reported: “Speaking on the occasion Madan Regmi, Chairman of China Study Center requested the Chinese government to extend the rail link up to Nepal's border.”

⁸² According to Nepalnews.com on March 20, 2006, a new China-Nepal border mapping operation began in the second week of April. The agency reported: “China and Nepal share a 1,400-kilometer-long borderline, along which there are 79 landmarks. Both countries carried out border inspection mapping in 1978 and 1988 respectively after two nations signed the boundary agreement in 1961.”

⁸³ Tibetans in the border areas of Nepal sometimes assist Tibetans who escape into exile through Namche Bazaar with the provision of food and shelter before they travel onto Kathmandu and the TRRC.

⁸⁴ Eastern Tibetan areas now incorporated into the Chinese provinces of Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu and Yunnan.

⁸⁵ One of the main PAP border patrol stations, located at Tragmar, some 25 kilometers to northwest of the Nangpa Pass. Tibetan refugees most often negotiate the Tragmar-Nangpa Pass area (2-3 days) by night to avoid the border patrols. They have usually walked for four days to a week before arriving in the Tragmar area. In 2002, the Tragmar patrol station installed flood lights to illuminate the area when security personnel are patrolling.

⁸⁶ The area is a few miles south of the Nangpa Pass on the Nepalese side of the border.

⁸⁷ Jeff Jackson, for the Wyoming-based specialist publication Rock and Ice, referred to the question, what should the climbers have done? “One clear responsibility involves bearing witness. ... According to Kate Saunders of the International Campaign for Tibet, bearing witness by reporting these human-rights abuses is “desperately needed in order to hold China to account for its actions. In that respect, too, it can really help if climbers inform themselves of the political situation when they plan to travel. Those climbers who have spoken out have been a terrific help — and essential for getting this issue raised with governments worldwide.” (www.rockandice.com, Issue 157). ICT President John Acklerly, an experienced climber, was quoted in the British Mountaineering Council's Summit magazine in winter 2006 as saying: “I think your first responsibility as a climber is to learn a little about the place where you're going... At the very least you should do no harm, either culturally or environmentally. But then I think you also have a responsibility to have a positive effect, especially when a flagrant, egregious human rights violation happens right in front of you. You become a participant whether you want to or not, simply by witnessing it.”