

"This effort at rewriting history is provocative and irresponsible, given the tensions between Chinese and Tibetans"

—ICT Statement



CHINA TO MARK TAKEOVER OF TIBET WITH "SERFS EMANCIPATION DAY"

Under the most repressive political conditions since the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese government is attempting to re-cast the politically sensitive 50th anniversary month of the Tibetan Uprising and full Chinese takeover as a holiday for 'Serfs Emancipation Day'. The state media has reported that a holiday on 28 March to mark the "emancipation of millions of serfs and slaves" in Tibet was unanimously approved during a meeting of 382 legislatures of Tibet Autonomous Region which concluded on 19 January.

The proposed 'Serfs Emancipation Day' issued by the Standing Committee of the Regional People's Congress is aimed at "reminding all the Chinese people, including Tibetans, of the landmark democratic reform initiated 50 years ago... since then, millions of slaves under the feudal serfdom became masters of their own." (Pang Boyong, Deputy Secretary-General of the Regional Congress Standing committee, Xinhua, 10 January).

In the post-Olympics period, the Chinese government continues to make vigorous representations in the state media of the success of its policies in Tibet, and to claim that in the period before "democratic reforms" began, the Tibetans were subjugated as "serfs". However, the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) continues to receive eyewitness accounts from Tibet that contradict the Chinese position. Mary Beth Markey, Vice President for International Advocacy of the ICT, said: "This effort at rewriting history is provocative and irresponsible, given the tensions between Chinese and Tibetans. Sadly, it reflects an approach the Chinese government has taken in Tibet for the last 50 years, which ignores Tibet's history, identity and the very real problems Tibetans face living under Chinese rule. It is a mockery of history and will not be taken seriously by the international community."

She further added: "The fact that the TAR People's Congress would be so eager to reject the interests of the Tibetan people in order to serve Beijing's propaganda goals, shows that Tibetans have no real collective rights and certainly no rights of autonomy, as claimed by Chinese government leaders."

Lhasa faces broad security sweep in Winter 'Strike Hard' Campaign

The situation in Lhasa is tense in the buildup to the 50th anniversary of the 1959 Tibetan Uprising in March, with the authorities carrying out almost daily detentions under a new winter "Strike Hard" campaign. The official Lhasa Evening News reported that the 'Strike Hard Unified Checking Campaign' had been launched on January 18, and included the detention of people for their "reactionary opinions" and for downloading "reactionary songs" onto their cellphones¹.

Strike Hard campaigns are typically carried out in various parts of the People's Republic of China prior to major events, including traditional Chinese New Year celebrations and other national holidays, as well as before the main annual government and Party conferences, often with the stated intention of "cleansing the social environment." However, with unprecedented levels of security already in place throughout Tibet, this latest Strike Hard campaign appears to be intended to intimidate Tibetans still further in the buildup to the Tibetan New Year in late February, followed a couple of weeks later by the 50th anniversary period of the March '59 Uprising and the Dalai Lama's flight to India, when the authorities fear further unrest following the wave of protests last year.

The Lhasa Evening News states that 5766 "suspects" were "thoroughly checked" over a three day period in a series of dawn police raids on rented accommodation, hotels and internet cafes. During the "investigation" on January 18, police detained "two people who had reactionary opinions and reactionary songs on their cell phones".

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INTERNATIONAL
CAMPAIGN
FOR TIBET

ICT Europe

Vijzelstraat 77
1017HG Amsterdam
The Netherlands

Phone: +31 (0)20 3308265
Fax: +31 (0)20 3308266
eupolicy@savetibet.org

ICT Brussels

11, rue de la linière
1060 Brussels
Belgium

Phone: +32 (0)2 609 44 10
Fax: +32 (0)2 609 44 32
ict-eu@savetibet.org

Tibetan NGO worker sentenced to life imprisonment for 'espionage'

A Tibetan who worked for an international public health NGO has been sentenced to life imprisonment and six other Tibetans to long prison terms for allegedly passing on information about the situation in Tibet, according to a report published in the Chinese media². Wangdu, a former Project Officer for an HIV/AIDS program in Lhasa run by the Australian Burnet Institute, was charged with "espionage" by the Lhasa City Intermediate People's Court. Three other Tibetans were sentenced from 10 to 15 years for "providing intelligence" to the "Dalai clique", and a second former NGO worker sentenced to 14 years imprisonment.

The sentences are unprecedented in their severity for Tibetans accused of passing on information to people outside Tibet. This new development indicates a harder line approach to blocking news on the current crackdown in Tibet, and also represents a challenge to NGOs working on the plateau. The official report, also underlines Beijing's view that the Dalai Lama was responsible for the wave of protests against Chinese rule from last March onwards. A definitive number of prisoners is not known due to the security crackdown and the Chinese authorities' efforts to silence Tibetans, including the warning implicit in the sentencing of Wangdu and the six other Tibetans.

Since March 2008, Chinese authorities have sought to impose an information blackout and for a period of several months virtually sealed off the plateau from the outside world. Thousands of Tibetans have been detained, with extreme brutality a routine feature of their detention. According to ICT, some Tibetans are profoundly psychologically disturbed upon release, with others unable to walk or speak, or with broken or dislocated limbs. There are serious fears for the welfare and safety of Wangdu, Migmar Dhondup, and the five other prisoners now sentenced in Lhasa.



Wangdu distributing HIV/AIDS awareness information in Lhasa (Photo: TCHRD)

These latest terms of imprisonment exceed other sentences imposed on Tibetans accused of communicating, or attempting to communicate, information to the outside world. Most recently, a Tibetan female cadre, Norzin Wangmo, was sentenced to five years for speaking to a friend on the phone about the situation in Tibet³. Exact details of the charges are unknown. In November 2007, two Tibetan men were sentenced to nine and ten years for 'espionage' after they were accused of attempting to pass on images and information about a protest by a Tibetan nomad, Runggye Adak after he took to the stage at the Lithang Horse Festival on 1 August 2007 and called for the return of the Dalai Lama to Tibet. It is notable that these prison sentences were longer than the one imposed on Runggye Adak himself, who was given an eight year term⁴. ■

¹ Published in Lhasa Evening News, 8 November 2008

² Lhasa Evening News, 23 January, translated at www.savetibet.org/media-center/ict-news-reports/authorities-launch-strike-hard-campaign-heightening-lhasa-tension

³ ICT report, "Disappearances continue across Tibet: Tibetan woman sentenced for talking on telephone," ICT, 19 November 2008

⁴ Sentencing details in a report by the US Congressional-Executive Commission on China, www.cecc.gov/pages/virtualAcad/index.phpd?showsingle=101223

The official report announced the sentencing of seven Tibetans for:

NAMES OF NEW POLITICAL PRISONERS	REASONS GIVEN BY LHASA CITY INTERMEDIATE PEOPLE'S COURT	SENTENCE TERMS
Wangdu (Chinese transliteration: Wangdai), former health worker	Espionage, accused of collecting "intelligence concerning the security and interests of the state and provid[ing] it to the Dalai clique...prior to and following the 'March 14' incident"	life imprisonment
Migmar Dhondup (Chinese transliteration: Mima Dunzhu), former NGO staff	Espionage	fourteen years in prison
Phuntsog Dorjee , a former political prisoner	For working with Wangdu in order to send information outside Tibet	nine years in prison
Tsewang Dorjee	Also accused of working with Wangdu to send information outside Tibet	eight years in prison
Yeshe Choedon (Chinese transliteration: Yixi Quzhen)	For espionage after she allegedly provided "intelligence and information harmful to the security and interests of the state to the Dalai clique's 'Security Department'"	fifteen years in prison
Sonam Tseten (Chinese transliteration: Suolang Cidian)	For the crime of illegally sending intelligence abroad. Dharamsala-based NGO Gu Chu Sum, which helps former political prisoners, was named as the recipient organization of this information	ten years in prison
Sonam Dakpa (Chinese transliteration: Suolang Zhaha)	Accused of being a member of "the Dalai clique's Tibetan Youth Congress NGO"	ten years in prison

CHINA TO FACE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL ON RIGHTS RECORD

China will have its human rights record scrutinized by the UN Human Rights Council and other UN Member States on 9 February in Geneva. The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a mechanism of the United Nations which reviews the human rights practices of all States, once every four years.

This is the first time China will be reviewed, and the UPR represents a vital opportunity for governments, as peers of the Chinese Government, to raise urgent concerns about China's human rights performance in Tibet and to recommend how the Chinese Government can meet its human rights obligations there. ICT, along with other NGOs, submitted a full report to the UN-OHCHR in Geneva, which described the current human right situation in Tibet¹. ICT has called on UN Member States to raise the following issues during the review:

1. Reports of arbitrary arrests, torture, ill-treatment and disappearance of Tibetans following a wave of largely peaceful protests across Tibet since March 2008. The UN Committee against Torture, the High Commissioner for Human Rights and seven mandate holders have all expressed concern at the use of

excessive force by the Chinese Government in response to the protests. The Chinese Government must ensure due process for all those detained, an end to torture of those in custody and a full and independent inquiry into ongoing reports of the excessive use of force by state security services against Tibetans.

2. The need for a non-violent, mutually acceptable solution to the Tibet issue. The Middle Way, as advocated by the Dalai Lama, represents a path to peace which safeguards the legitimate cultural, religious and human rights of the Tibetan people while respecting the territorial integrity and Constitution of the People's Republic of China.

3. The Chinese Government's obligation to respect and safeguard Tibetan social, economic and cultural rights. Both the UN bodies and Tibetan NGOs have reported extensively on religious persecution in Tibet, discrimination against Tibetans, lack of access to healthcare and Tibetan education, state violence against women, including nuns, and the forced relocation of Tibetan nomads.

Governments, UN bodies, senior UN officials, independent experts and NGOs have all called upon China to respect the rights of Tibetans and to sincerely engage the Dalai Lama to solve the root problems in Tibet and create a harmonious relationship between Tibetans and the Chinese Government. ICT has called on governments to use the UPR to reiterate that message. ■

¹ To view the report, visit www.upr-info.org/IMG/pdf/TUPRF_CHN_UPR_S4_2009_TibetanUPRForum_JOINT.pdf

TIBETANS SUPPORT "CHARTER 08" AND CALL FOR LIU XIAOBO'S RELEASE

On 10 December 2008, marking the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a group of over 300 prominent Chinese citizens from both outside and inside the Government, released a document known as 'Charter 08'¹. The Charter envisions a constitutional democratic China and calls for greater freedom and political reform, including an end to the Communist Party's monopoly on power. Along with well known Tibetan writer Woeser from Lhasa, a large number of Tibetan exile groups have signed in support of the document and called for immediate release of Beijing-based writer.

Just prior to the launch of the document, the Chinese authorities arbitrarily arrested two prominent co-authors of the Charter, Liu Xiaobo and Zhang Zuhua on 8 December. The latter has since been released but Liu Xiaobo remains in custody. Liu Xiaobo was also a key figure behind the "Twelve Suggestions for Dealing with the Tibet Situation," released in March, in which he and other prominent intellectuals called on the Chinese government to respect the Tibetan people's right to freely



Tibetan writer Woeser (L) and Liu Xiaobo (R), both leading signatories of Charter 08

express their views and for China's leaders "to hold direct dialogue with the Dalai Lama."²

The detention of Liu is considered one of the most significant Chinese dissident cases in the last ten years. So far, no official charge has been announced, but rights groups fear the use of vague 'national security' laws. The European Union and the United States have expressed

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Despite Chinese pressure, the Dalai Lama was welcomed by European Parliament President Hans-Gert Pottering (R) in Brussels on 4 December, 2008. (Photo: Reuters)

COORDINATED INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE ON TIBET CAN SHIFT CHINESE INTRANSIGENCE

In December, United Nations Chief Ban Ki-moon called on China to continue its dialogue with representatives of the Dalai Lama. Ban said: "I hope the Chinese authorities will continue to resolve this issue through dialogue," and he added that he hoped dialogue would continue "in a sincere manner, so all the concerns concerning Tibet will be resolved smoothly and harmoniously."

But in an article in the influential Human Rights Quarterly¹, law professor Michael Davis from Hong Kong University affirms that "after years of talking to Tibetan exiles about conditions in their homeland, Chinese officials have made it clear that they were not serious about it. Unless the international community adopts a coordinated position on Tibet's autonomy this may not bode well for either Tibet or for China's relations with the world".

In particular, in his article entitled 'Establishing a Workable Autonomy in Tibet', Professor Davis addresses the following issues:

- China's sensitivities over Tibet, which led to the Chinese cancellation of the EU-China summit in protest at President Sarkozy's meeting with the Dalai Lama
- The March uprisings in Tibet that pushed Chinese officials to reopen discussions with the Dalai Lama, the lack of efforts that the Chinese government showed, the deadlock in the talks and the threat by China to shun any international leaders who meet with the Dalai Lama
- China's desire to maintain unity in its sovereign territory despite questions over different treatment for areas like Hong Kong and Macao

- The need for China to recognize that punitive actions like boycotts of European goods will only invite retaliation, and isolation of Tibetan exiles only makes difficulties more pronounced

Davis concludes that unless there is a coordinated effort by world leaders to maintain an open door to the Dalai Lama, rejecting Chinese efforts to isolate him, accompanied by constructive efforts to help China to better understand its international obligations to its Tibetan minority, it may not bode well for either Tibet or China's relations with the world. ■

¹To read the full article, visit: www.press.jhu.edu/journals/human_rights_quarterly/30.2Tibet.pdf

TIBETANS SUPPORT "CHARTER 08"...

'deep concerns' over the detention and urged China to release him.

The Dalai Lama has also called for Liu's release and said he was greatly encouraged by the launching of Charter 08 and that the "harmonious society" called for by President Hu Jintao is laudable but can only come into being when there is trust among the people, freedom from fear, freedom of expression, rule of law, justice and equality³. ■

¹The Charter can be found at: www.savetibet.org/media-center/charter-08

²www.savetibet.org/media-center/ict-news-reports/leading-chinese-intellectuals-ask-china-rethink-tibet-policy

³See www.dalailama.com/news.326.htm