

Tibet Brief

A monthly report of the International Campaign for Tibet



NOVEMBER 2009



Loyak as shown on state television (Credit: TCHRD)

“The EU reiterates its concerns about the conditions under which the trials were conducted, especially with regard to whether due process and other safeguards for a fair trial were respected.”

– EU Statement, 29 October 2009

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Lhasa executions condemned by EU and UK

The British government and EU Presidency have condemned the execution of two Tibetans in Lhasa for their alleged roles in the protests and unrest in Lhasa on March 14, 2008, according to reports by Tibetan exile organizations confirmed by the Chinese embassy in London on 23 October. Lobsang Gyaltzen and Loyak were sentenced to death in April 2009 on charges relating to “starting fatal fires,” according to a report in the Chinese state media. They are the first known executions of Tibetans in connection with the Lhasa riot on March 14, 2008 although others have been killed following torture in custody.

The Dharamsala, India-based NGO Gu Chu Sum, which helps former political prisoners, reported on the executions on October 21, however, the executions of two other Tibetans in Lhasa, a woman called Penkyi and an unnamed Tibetan reported by the Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD) based in Dharamsala, were not officially confirmed. A Tibetan woman, Penkyi, from Shigatse, had received a suspended death sentence - although it is rare that people given suspended death sentences in China are actually executed.

TCHRD reported that the body of Lobsang Gyaltzen was handed over to his family after the death sentence had been carried out by shooting, and was later immersed in the Kyichu (Lhasa) river. The ashes of Loyak were returned to his family, TCHRD reported.

EU Statements

The first strong public statement from a foreign government came from the British Foreign Office Minister Ivan Lewis, who raised concern about both death penalty cases during the first UK Ministerial visit to Lhasa last month. In a statement on the Foreign Office website¹, Mr. Lewis said: “I condemn the recent executions in Lhasa of two Tibetans, Mr Lobsang Gyaltzen and Mr Loyak. We respect China's right to bring those responsible for the violence in Tibet last year to justice. But the UK opposes the death penalty in all circumstances, and we have consistently raised our concerns about lack of due process in these cases in particular.” Mr. Lewis said that during his visit to the Tibet Autonomous Region in September he had urged the authorities not to carry out the death sentence, and he called on China to review urgently the cases

of those who remain under sentence of death for their alleged involvement in last year's unrest.

On October 29, the Swedish EU Presidency released a statement² on behalf of the EU which also condemned the executions “on the basis of its principled opposition to the death penalty”. The statement noted that while the EU respects China's right to bring those who resorted to violence to justice, it reaffirmed its opposition to the use of the death penalty under all circumstances and also noted the EU's “concerns about the conditions under which the trials were conducted, especially with regard to whether due process and other safeguards for a fair trial were respected.”

The EU also called on China to commute all death sentences imposed for alleged involvement in the Lhasa unrest of March 2008.

Case Background

An official report on April 8, 2009, stated that Losang Gyaltzen had been sentenced to death “for setting fire to two garment shops in downtown

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Lhasa executions...

Lhasa on March 14 that killed a shop owner Zuo Rencun”, according to a spokesman for the Lhasa Municipal Intermediate People’s Court (Xinhua). In another case, Loyak received the death penalty for allegedly setting fire to a motorcycle dealership in Dechen township in Lhasa’s Taktse (Chinese: Dagze) county on March 15 last year, according to the same article, leading to the deaths of five people.

The court spokesperson said: “The two defendants [Lobsang Gyaltzen and Loyak] given death penalties had committed extremely serious crimes and have to be executed to assuage the people’s anger. For those defendants who deserve lesser punishments under statutory or discretionary circumstances, they were given lighter punishments according to the law,” he said. (Xinhua, April 8, 2009.)

Often in the People’s Republic of China, death sentences are passed months or even weeks after a suspect has been detained on suspicion of committing a capital crime. In the cases in Lhasa, sentencing took more than a year and may be due to the political sensitivities of the case.

The last known case of the execution of a Tibetan was in 2003, when Lobsang Dhondrub was executed for alleged involvement in a bomb blast in Chengdu in April 2002. This was linked to the case of Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche, a respected religious teacher whose death sentence was commuted to life. On January 26, 2003, the Sichuan High People’s Court rejected Tenzin Delek Rinpoche’s appeal against his sentence and the appeal that had apparently been entered for Lobsang Dhondrub. Within hours Lobsang Dhondrub was executed. Some reports suggest he was executed very early in the morning of that day, even before the appeal was formally rejected.

Until the UK government’s statement on October 23 there had been no official confirmation of the executions, which may be indicative of the sensitive political climate following the crackdown imposed after the protests began in March, 2008. According to Radio Free Asia, an official at the Lhasa People’s Intermediate Court referred questions about the executions to a colleague and asked reporters to phone back later, at which time the phone rang unanswered. ■

¹ See: <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/news/latest-news/?view=News&id=21082898>

² http://www.se2009.eu/en/meetings_news/2009/10/29/declaration_by_the_presidency_on_behalf_of_the_european_union_regarding_the_recent_executions_of_two_tibetans

World Parliamentarians’ Convention on Tibet in Rome, November

The 5th World Parliamentarians’ Convention on Tibet (WPCT) will be held in Rome on 17-19 November 2009. The event, which brings together international parliamentarians involved in Tibet and China affairs, will be hosted by the Italian Parliamentary Intergroup for Tibet. His Holiness the Dalai Lama will address the Opening Session in the morning of 18th November.

In a letter to parliamentarians Mr. Matteo Mecacci, head of the Italian Parliamentary Intergroup for Tibet, wrote: “The

World Parliamentarians’ Convention on Tibet



situation in Tibet remains grave. We, however, see an opportunity. In spite of Chinese intimidation tactics and propaganda, we are well acquainted with the Dalai Lama and his middle way position for genuine autonomy for Tibetans within the People’s Republic of China. Over the decades, many of us

have traveled to Beijing, Lhasa and Dharamsala. We have played an important role by speaking truth to power.”

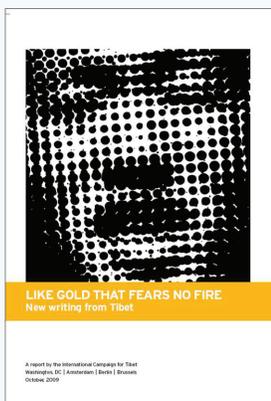
The Convention combines keynote speakers on priority topics related to the situation in Tibet and China, as well as working sessions for parliamentarians to discuss activities and ideas with each other and Tibetan officials.

The first WPCT was held in New Delhi in 1994 and has since been held in Vilnius (1995), Washington DC (1997) and Edinburgh (2005). The WPCT has contributed substantially to the understanding of Tibetan issues and facilitated communication in support of concerted and coordinated actions by parliamentarians.

For information on attending the Convention, please contact your local Office of Tibet or write to ICT at eupolicy@savetibet.org. ■

New ICT Report: “Like Gold that Fears no Fire: New Writing from Tibet”

A new collection of writings by Tibetans inside Tibet, including extracts from books that are banned by the Chinese government and work by writers now in prison, was launched on October 18 by the International Campaign for Tibet at the Frankfurt International Book Fair, the biggest literary trade event in the world.



The book, “Like Gold that Fears No Fire: New Writing from Tibet” features stories of imprisonment, interrogation, death and loss, as well as perspectives on a better future that reveal an unquenchable spirit and deeply-felt Tibetan identity. The stories, poems and essays in this rich and diverse collection focus on the experiences of Tibetans since a wave of overwhelmingly peaceful protests swept across Tibet from March 2008, to be met by a violent crackdown. Writers and artists are among hundreds of Tibetans who have faced torture and imprisonment for peaceful expression of their views.

In one book that was banned as soon as it was published in Tibet, a writer reflects: “In a year that turned out to be like a raging storm... how could we remain... in fear. [This work is] a sketch of history written in the blood of a generation.”

Since the protests began, the Chinese government has sought to cover up the disappearances and killings that have taken place across Tibet combined with a propaganda offensive against the exiled Tibetan leader, the Dalai Lama. The Tibetan writers featured in the book, most of whom are still in Tibet and China, dare to challenge China’s official version of events representing a more profound challenge to the Communist government than ever before.

“Like gold that fears no fire” opens with an original article by the most well-known Tibetan writer Woesser, an accomplished poet and one of the most eloquent and fiercest analysts of Chinese oppression in Tibet. Woesser’s powerful article outlines the importance of story-telling for an oppressed people to affirm their history and identity. Woesser argues that the events of 2008 are as significant in contemporary Tibetan history as those of March 1959, when tensions against the Chinese presence in Tibet escalated into an uprising, and led to the Dalai Lama’s escape into exile.

Like Gold that Fears no Fire also features:

- Reflections on Tibetan identity today by a blogger: “[Tibetans] are no longer just trying to fit into the Chinese national story; instead they are creating their own. It is a new cultural moment... [young Tibetans] are starting to have the chance to be many things and at the same time still be Tibetan.”
- Powerful poetry by writers inside Tibet and in exile
- The diary of an interrogation by a Tibetan writer
- An essay by Tibetan scholar Lamajabb, who finds the cause of the protests that convulsed the plateau not in some phantom instigation of the ‘Dalai clique’ but “in the tragic Tibetan history that began in the 1950s and the shortcomings of China’s Tibet policy”
- Lyrics of a song by monks imprisoned in Tibet
- The first English translation of a section of a book by Tibetan author Dolma Kyab, serving ten and a half years in prison as a result of his manuscript

The book can be downloaded for free at: <http://www.savetibet.org/files/documents/Like%20Gold.pdf> ■

Representative of EU’s Economic & Social Committee visits Dharamsala

Following a visit to Tibet in September, an official mission of the EU’s Economic and Social Committee visited Dharamsala, India during October to learn more about the work and policies of the Tibetan Government in Exile.

From 11-15 September 2009, a delegation composed of President Sepi, Peter Clever and Sukdev Sharma of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), a consultative body constituted by employers, employees and other interest groups, visited Lhasa. The objective of this fact-finding mission was to increase the knowledge of the Committee on social and economic conditions in the TAR in order to develop possible fields of cooperation between civil societies active in Europe and in Tibet and to deepen the activities of the EU-China roundtables taking place twice a year. This mission was the first visit of Tibet after the unrest in 2008 by one of the EU institutions.

In order to gain a more complete view of the Tibetan situation, an additional official mission of the EESC represented by Mr. Peter Clever was sent to Dharamsala from 12-14 October. ICT helped in preparing the visit and Vincent Metten, head of ICT’s Brussels office joined Mr. Clever in Dharamsala. The EESC representative met with several non-governmental organizations, Tibetan Prime Minister Samdhong Rinpoche, all members of the Kashag (Parliament), the Tibetan Cabinet-in-exile and with the Dalai Lama, during a one-hour private audience.

At a press conference in Dharamsala, Mr. Clever stated the importance of including exiled Tibetans in this discussion: “The reality to be found there in Tibet must be completed by the reality we were taught by those people who decided to leave their homeland...this is also a Tibetan reality.” Mr. Clever said he would explore the opportunity to invite the Dalai Lama to directly address the EESC in Brussels and explain his views on development issues related to Tibet. EESC President Sepi stated that the mission report will also “integrate the result of our discussion with representatives of the Tibetans in exile”. ■