

Tibet Brief

A monthly report of the International Campaign for Tibet



April 2011

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March 2011

Dalai Lama to hand over all government duties to elected leader



Tibetans commemorating the Tibetan National Uprising Day on 10 March, 2011 in Dharamsala India. (Photo: Abhishek Madhukar)

The Dalai Lama has announced his desire for the full devolution of his responsibilities in the Tibetan exile government to the elected Tibetan leader or Kalon Tripa. In his annual address to the Tibetan people during the 10 March commemoration of the 1959 Tibetan National Uprising against the Chinese occupation of Tibet, the Dalai Lama said: "As early as the 1960's, I have repeatedly stressed that Tibetans need a leader, elected freely by the Tibetan people to whom I can devolve power. Now we have clearly reached the time to put this into effect."

The Dalai Lama's decision to fully devolve his formal political authority to an elected Tibetan leadership will require a legal response within the Tibetan democratic system from the Tibetan Parliament in Exile. Tsering Jampa, Executive Director of ICT-Europe said, "No one can dispute the relevance of the Dalai Lama as the natural leader of the Tibetan people, but now we will see how the Tibetan leaders in parliament respond to a significant step for the Tibetan people in the democratic process."

On 14 March, His Holiness the Dalai Lama went into more detail on his retirement statement in a message delivered to the Fourteenth Assembly of Tibetan People's Deputies (full text: <http://tinyurl.com/5rc4hwr>). He explained that he should be relieved of functions related to his political and administrative status and amendments to the Charter of Tibetans in Exile and other related regulations should be made accordingly. The Tibetan Parliament has decided to meet in May in a special session to consider amendments to the Charter in keeping with the message of the Dalai Lama.

This represents a significant step towards the realization of the Dalai Lama's objective of making the Tibetan people self-reliant. In a resolution passed on 25 March 2011, the Parliament decided to appoint a drafting committee, jointly composed of members of the Kashag (Cabinet - highest executive office of the Central Tibetan Administration) and the Parliament, to study the recommendations made by the Action Plan Committee to the Parliament on 23 March, as well as views expressed by members. The drafting committee will propose a text for the possible amendments to the Charter, to be submitted to the Parliament by 11 April 2011. The present Parliament will then meet in a special session in May to decide on the amendments and related matters. ■

See also:

- Full text His Holiness the Dalai Lama's March 10 statement: <http://tinyurl.com/63k54qs>
- Bhuchung K. Tsering's blog post: <http://tinyurl.com/5vd9l2b>



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Tibetan Diaspora elects new Prime Minister and Government in Exile



Tibetan father voting in Brussels on 20 March, 2011

More than 82,000 exile Tibetans across the world voted on 20 March 2011 for the new Kalon Tripa (Prime Minister), who will head the Tibetan Administration in Exile. The election is especially significant following the Dalai Lama's statement to the Tibetan Parliament on 10 March of his intention to completely devolve political authority to an elected leadership.

The election covers votes to elect the Kalon Tripa, the Chairman of the Cabinet, as well as 44 members of the Tibetan Parliament. The mood of optimism across the diaspora was marred by the news that more than 10,000 Tibetans in Nepal did not get permission to vote on 20 March from the Nepalese authorities in Kathmandu, under increasing pressure from the Chinese government. During the earlier round of voting in Nepal in October 2010, Kathmandu police confiscated ballot boxes and shut down the Tibetan community voting sites (see: <http://tinyurl.com/32ce8se>). According to observers in Kathmandu, on 10 March, Nepalese police used "undue force" as Tibetans gathered to commemorate the 52nd anniversary of National Uprising Day (see: <http://tinyurl.com/5sv4wyn>).

Tibetans outside Tibet voted in various parts of Asia, Europe and the Americas where there is a significant concentration of Tibetans. The elections in Brussels, Zurich, New York and Toronto have been observed by a group from the International Network of Parliamentarians for Tibet (INPaT). Matteo Meccacci, co-chair of the Network, reached an agreement with the Tibetan Election Commission to observe for the first time the elections by having full access to polling stations and counting centers. Meccacci said that the election process needed to be observed and appreciated by the global community of democracies. Heidi Hautala, chairwoman of the European Parliament Committee on Human Rights (DROI), in a blogpost said that elections of Tibetan community in exile represented a major step forward towards a full democratic system and expressed her concern about the unfortunate situation for Tibetans refugees in Nepal (see: <http://www.heidihautala.fi/2011/03/democracy-for-tibet/>).

The Dharamsala-based Tibetan Election Commission will announce the final results on 27 April 2011. The new Tibetan Parliament may already be in session in June-July, while the new Kalon Tripa should be in place by August (Tibetan Election Commission: <http://tinyurl.com/6ddndrt>). ■

See also: ► INPaT Statement on Tibetan Elections: <http://www.unpo.org/article/12416>
► ICT Press Release: <http://tinyurl.com/6cfrf98>
► Photos and impressions from ICT observers of Tibetan elections: <http://tinyurl.com/3fu6w9>

International NGOs call on Nepal to respect basic freedoms

On the eve of the 10 March anniversary of the Tibetan National Uprising, international NGOs Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International (AI) and the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), released a joint statement calling on the new government of Nepal to respect the rights of Tibetans in Nepal to freedom of expression, assembly and association. They stated that these rights are guaranteed for all persons in Nepal by international human rights treaties, to which Nepal is a party, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). They urged the government not to repeat the restrictions imposed on Tibetans' in Nepal in recent years and to allow people to express their views peacefully, without unnecessary restrictions. ■

See also: Joint Press Statement:

- <http://tinyurl.com/6b95q6d>
- <http://tinyurl.com/6y2cg9u>
- <http://tinyurl.com/66np9ov>

Dalai Lama in video conversation with Chinese human rights lawyers

On 4 January the Dalai Lama participated in a video conversation with Chinese human rights lawyers Jiang Tianyong and Teng Biao (currently under house arrest after "Jasmine" peaceful gatherings in Beijing in February 2011, source: China Human Rights Defenders). The discussion was organized by Wang Lixiong, husband of the well-known Tibetan poet, essayist and blogger Woesser. Woesser herself was present during the video conference and later wrote a piece on this "cyber" meeting entitled "How I met His Holiness the Dalai Lama Without Passport" (<http://tinyurl.com/6gu79nt>):

" (...) I have always longed for this moment to come true. But, I cannot get a passport, just like many other Tibetans, it is almost unthinkable that this regime that controls us will ever grant us a passport, which should, in actual fact, be a fundamental right that every citizen enjoys (...) However, the internet gave my passport-less self a pass to travel; in the New Year, it helped me to make my dream come true – through the internet I met, as if in a dream but still very vivid and real, His Holiness the Dalai Lama! (...)". ■

Woesser, Beijing, January 5, 2011



United Nations: Nepal pressed to end forced return of Tibetan asylum seekers to China



Tibetan refugees eating at the Tibetan Refugee Reception Center in Kathmandu, Nepal, an essential lifeline for the refugees coming across the border.

As the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review mechanism scrutinized Nepal's human rights record on 25 January 2011 in Geneva, Nepal's Ambassador Dinesh Bhattarai claimed that no forceful deportations of Tibetan refugees occur from Nepal. The Nepalese delegation was responding to the U.S. delegation statement urging them to continue

"its long-standing commitment to ensure the safe passage through Nepal of Tibetan asylum seekers and refraining from forcibly returning Tibetan asylum seekers to China."

"While we appreciate that the U.S. Administration had raised the plight of Tibetan refugees in Nepal, we were shocked at the total denial by the Nepalese delegation over the refoulement of Tibetan refugees when cases have been documented by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Governments, NGOs and the media," Ms. Tsering Jampa, Executive Director of ICT-Europe said.

Nepal refused to accept the recommendation of the U.S. delegation to: "Protect vulnerable refugee populations by allowing for registration of the refugee population in Nepal and by refraining from forcibly returning Tibetan asylum seekers to China," contained in the draft report to the Council's Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Nepal again claimed that "there was no policy of forcibly returning the refugees."

However, in May 2003, the UNHCR in a press statement expressed grave concern about the fate of 18 Tibetan asylum seekers deported to China by Nepal. The statement said that the Nepalese authorities "decided to go ahead with the deportation on Saturday, ignoring last-minute appeals by the UN refugee agency and human rights groups. UNHCR learned that the deported group included eight unaccompanied minors, some as young as 13." UNHCR officials described the move as a blatant violation of Nepal's obligations under international law.

As documented by ICT annual Dangerous Crossing reports, ICT's written submission to the UPR mechanism "urged Nepal to uphold the principle of non-refoulement by taking adequate policy and administrative steps, including written policy instruction to immigration officials and border police, and training of Nepali police, security forces and immigration authorities about proper procedures and international human rights norms. ■

Monk dies following self-immolation protest against lack of freedoms



Phuntsog, the 20-year old Kirti monk who set himself on fire in the main market area of Ngaba town.

On 16 March 2011 protests were violently suppressed at Kirti Monastery in the Ngaba area of Tibet after a young monk set himself on fire and later died. Phuntsog immolated himself on the anniversary of a protest at Kirti Monastery in 2008, during which at least 10 Tibetans were shot dead. Police extinguished the flames and were seen beating Phuntsog before he died, according to Tibetan exiles in contact with Tibetans in Ngaba (Chinese: Aba) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan province (the Tibetan area of Amdo). According to the same sources, protests

then broke out against the Chinese authorities involving hundreds of monks and laypeople. After an attempted peaceful march from the monastery, police broke up the protests, detaining an unknown number of monks and beating Tibetans involved.

On 18 March Phuntsog was cremated in a ceremony that was attended by thousands of monks. According to sources in exile in contact with people in Ngaba, government authorities in the area have prohibited regular religious services at Kirti Monastery since 19 March; monks are not allowed to leave the monastery and members of the public are not allowed to enter. The situation remains tense at the monastery and surrounding area, with a heavy military presence.

On 3 April a monk from the Labrang monastery, Jamyang Jinpa, 37, died following severe torture in detention after protesting in front of foreign journalists at his monastery on 9 April 2008. His death comes just a few weeks after the death of 42-year old Sangey Gyatso, another of the group of 15 Labrang monks who participated in offences within weeks of one another is indicative of the severity of the crackdown on Tibetan monks - in place since the wide scale protests of 2008 - and of conditions for them in Chinese prisons. ■

See also: ICT Reports:

- ▶ <http://tinyurl.com/6xxoufy>
- ▶ <http://tinyurl.com/3mhguy3>

See also:

- ▶ ICT Report: <http://tinyurl.com/68l3846>

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EP commemorates Tibetan National Uprising



from the left, **Roy Strider**, activist of Friends of Tibet - Estonia and columnist for Tibet Sun, **Thomas Mann**, MEP, **Kristina Ojuland**, MEP, **Kelsang Gyaltzen**, Envoy of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and **Vincent Metten**, EU Policy Director at ICT

The European Parliament has commemorated the 52nd Anniversary of the March 1959 Tibetan National Uprising. On 16 March, Mr. Edward McMillan-Scott, Vice-President of the European Parliament responsible for Democracy and Human Rights, and Ms. Kristina Ojuland MEP hosted an ALDE seminar (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe – EP Political Group) on Tibet at the Parliament in Brussels. Entitled “52 Years since the Tibetan Uprising: Common Ground for Tibet and China?” the event was held on the eve of the 2011 elections for the Tibetan Government and Tibetan Parliament in Exile. Speakers noted the significance of the elections, coming just days after the Dalai Lama’s announcement of his retirement as the political head of the Central Tibetan Administration.

Panelists praised the peaceful election and the Tibetan development of democratic

institutions, unlike their Chinese counterparts, which could be a model for a future democratic China. They also stressed that the Tibetan issue must be raised whenever meeting the representatives of the Peoples’ Republic of China. Kelsang Gyaltzen, Envoy of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, appealed to the European Parliament to send Parliamentary delegations to Tibet. He said: “Opening Tibet to parliamentarians, international observers, press, etcetera, contributes to better treatment of Tibetans.” Finally, panelists said that this was a pivotal step forward for the Tibetan democracy that has to show to be mature enough to take bold steps that will have far reaching impact for the Tibetans as people, irrespective of how the political issue is resolved. ■

See also ► <http://tinyurl.com/6x9jsbj>

This number’s reading suggestion

In the Shadow of the Buddha: Secret Journeys, Sacred Histories, and Spiritual Discovery in Tibet

By Matteo Pistono

Matteo Pistono is a writer and practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism. He was born and raised in India where he completed his undergraduate degree in Anthropology from the University of Wyoming. In 1997, he obtained his Master of Arts degree in Indian Philosophy from the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. Pistono lived and traveled throughout the Himalayas for a decade, bringing to the West graphic accounts and photos of China’s human rights abuses in Tibet.

“In the Shadow of the Buddha: Secret Journeys, Sacred Histories, and Spiritual Discovery in Tibet” is a book about Tibet through the eyes of a devotee. However, it details not only Pistono’s pilgrimage, but also human rights violations against Tibetans by the Chinese government. It is a book that advocates the struggle of a people for their cultural identity and rights. ■

See also:

► <http://www.matteopistono.com/>

Upcoming Events

► 27 April 2011:
Tibetan Election Results

► 21-23 May 2011:
Second Tibetan National
General Meeting (Dharamsala)



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