

*"The PRC authorities must be convinced that repression and military might will not resolve any problems and that tolerance and engagement are the only effective means to bring stability in Tibet."*

—Tibetan Exile Government



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In the buildup of 50th Anniversary in March, Chinese security forces seen in Lhasa (Chinese: Tongren), the birth place of Dalai Lama in Qinghai on February 26. (Photo: Reuters)

## PROTESTS, ARRESTS AND SENTENCES CONTINUE ACROSS THE TIBETAN PLATEAU WITH STRIKE HARD CAMPAIGN

Tensions are high ahead of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1959 Tibetan Uprising in March and the Dalai Lama's flight into exile. Reports of sporadic protests, arrests and sentences of Tibetans continue across the Tibetan plateau.

Police opened fire on a group of five monks who staged a protest in Derge (Chinese: Dege) County of Eastern Tibet calling for Tibetan independence and the return of the Dalai Lama to Tibet on January 27 2009. In the same month, a protest by Tibetan monks in Kardze County was quelled by police amid reports of gunfire and detentions. Information received from sources confirmed that 33 year old Choephel from Ngaba County was sentenced to 4 years. Sources said that Choephel's left eye was blinded due to injuries suffered at the hands of authorities. Similarly, it was reported that two monks from Tsawa Pashoe Mera Monastery in Chamdo Prefecture, shouted slogans and staged a protest. It is unclear where they are being held, but the head of the monastery has also been detained.

International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) has previously reported that the situation in Lhasa is tense in the buildup to the anniversary and with the authorities carrying out almost daily detentions under a new winter "Strike Hard" campaign. A Lhasa Evening News article on January 23 reported on 'suspects' being 'thoroughly checked' and the detention of two people for downloading reactionary songs.<sup>1</sup>

On February 23, an editorial in the official Chinese media Tibet Daily called on people to "firmly crush the savage aggression of the Dalai clique, defeat separatism, and wage people's war to maintain stability."

At press conferences on January 29 and February 21, the Cabinet of the Exile Tibetan Government, the Kashag, urged Chinese authorities to call-off the "Strike Hard" campaign

and to put an end to their hard-line policies in Tibet. The Kashag also appealed to parliaments, governments and human rights organizations around the world to actively intervene to persuade China to exercise restraint, and prevail upon them that repression and military might will not resolve any problems and that tolerance and engagement are the only effective means to bring stability in Tibet.<sup>2</sup>

Sites of Tibetan Demonstrations and Protests 2008-2009



Sites compiled from various sources where protests are reported to have taken place. ■ Spring 2008 ■ Jan-March 2009

Comparison of Tibetan protest locations in 2008 and 2009.

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## CHINA DISMISSES HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS ON TIBET DURING UN RIGHTS REVIEW

During February, China's widely criticized human rights record went under the scrutiny of the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Panel. China rejected any mention of the human rights situation in Tibet at the conclusion of the major international review of its human rights record despite the fact that the issue was raised by more than six countries. The UPR process, which is held every four years, represented the first major opportunity for the international community to discuss human rights in China since the Beijing Olympics and the beginning of the crackdown in Tibet last year. Austria, Portugal, Germany and South Africa raised concerns relating to minority rights in China without specifically referring to the Tibet



UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon with Chinese President Hu Jintao in Beijing on July 2, 2008 (Photo: AFP)

situation, while Russia, Pakistan and Sri Lanka focused on defending and applauding China's human rights record. Pakistan characterized ongoing unrest in Tibet as the result of foreign influences.<sup>3</sup>

Mary Beth Markey, Vice President for Advocacy for the ICT, said: "China's refusal to accept any of the many recommendations on human rights in Tibet raises serious concerns beyond its own engagement in the UPR process. The fact that these recommendations could be negotiated away in a back room damages the integrity of the UPR itself, which is intended to be a serious and constructive review of human rights practices, as measured against international norms. We have witnessed a gross and willful politicization of the process by China and its collaborators on the Human Rights Council."

The Chinese delegation also negotiated the rejection of points on state secrets laws, the death penalty, and other human right issues raised by different countries - ensuring that 70 of 119 recommendations made were excluded from the final draft. The explanation given was that these recommendations "did not enjoy the support of China".

The PRC accepted recommendations from Zimbabwe, Cuba, Sudan and Iran, but rejected all recommendations of the UK, France and the Czech Republic.

The Czech Republic which holds the current Presidency of the European Union was the only country to refer to specific political prisoners in its statement recommending the following to China:

- 1) End the 'strike hard campaign' associated with numerous serious violations of human rights**
- 2) To investigate all cases of police brutality and torture as death of Mr. Pema Tsepak in Chambo in January this year.**
- 3) To ensure protection of right of peaceful assembly and to release all persons arrested in this connection as Ms. Tashi Tao and Ms. Dhungtso in Kardze County.**

The Chinese delegation, led by Chinese Ambassador Li Baodong, said that the concerns it had dismissed were "politicised statements". Recently, the State Council Information Office of Chinese government has published a White Paper ahead of the 50th anniversary of Dalai Lama's exile where the government shows development in Tibet and accuses the West of using "Tibet to attack China". ■

<sup>1</sup> Translation of that text from Chinese to English can be found at: <http://www.savetibet.org/media-center/inside-tibet-reports/authoritieslaunch-strike-hard-campaign-heightening-lhasa-tension>

<sup>2</sup> See: <http://www.tibet.net/en/index.php?id=723&articletype=flash&rmenuid=morenews>

<sup>3</sup> For more details check: <http://www.savetibet.org/media-center/ict-press-releases/china-dismisses-human-rights-concerns-tibet-rare-public-review>

## TIBETANS ENGAGE IN CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE BY REFUSING TO CELEBRATE TIBETAN NEW YEAR

During February, several international newspapers highlighted the depth of wariness expressed through large number of Tibetans not celebrating their 'Losar', which fell on February 25. Major reasons include the continued repression in Tibet and the crackdown by Chinese authorities in Tibet last year, which lead to hundreds of deaths and thousands of arrests. Following is a brief account of key incidents reported since January relating to the New Year ceremony in different parts of Tibetan areas.

- On February 3, it was reported that Police in Lhasa have arrested dozens of Tibetans suspected of supporting the civil movement against celebrating the Tibetan New Year. Issuing appeals on the internet and through text messages, Tibetans say it should be a time of remembrance not celebration.<sup>4</sup>
- On February 16, nomads, monks and local people in Lithang (Chinese: Litang) in Sichuan Province took to the streets after a solitary protest by a 39-year old monk, Lobsang Lhundup. Lobsang staged a protest the day before calling on Tibetans not to celebrate the Tibetan New Year. Other Tibetans joined in the protest and Lobsang was taken away by police. The following day, February 16, more people gathered to continue the protest and to demand the release of Lobsang. The protestors led by Sonam Tenpa, a younger brother of Lobsang, marched through the main street market in Lithang shouting slogans and carrying a large portrait of the Dalai Lama for as long as two hours before police intervened. Sources report that police used extreme violence in the process of detaining and loading the protestors onto military trucks by the Chinese Public Security Bureau (PSB) and People's Armed Police (PAP), with 21 people being detained since February. The current whereabouts and their condition could not be ascertained. It is confirmed that the county has been under lockdown for weeks after these protests.
- Following those incidents, Tibetans in exile announced the decision to mark this year's Tibetan New Year celebrations with only religious programmes. The usual festivities and feasts were cancelled.
- On February 19, news has emerged of an incident in which police opened fire following a confrontation between Chinese police and Tibetans in Nagchu (Chinese: Naqu) county – a largely nomadic area of Central Tibet traversed by the Qinghai-Tibet railway.
- On February 25, around hundred monks staged a candle-lit vigil and protest outside the government headquarters in Mangra (Chinese: Guinan) county, Tsoelho (Chinese: Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, in Qinghai on the first day of Tibetan New Year. The monastery is now surrounded by armed police, with an ultimatum issued today for the organizers of the protest to "surrender" within 48 hours, and for any monks who own a portrait of the Dalai Lama to be expelled from the monastery.<sup>5</sup>
- On the same day, a similar protest was staged at Dhitsha monastery in nearby Bayan Khar (Chinese: Hualong) county, Tsoshar (Chinese: Haidong) Tibetans Autonomous Prefecture, where the Director of Qinghai United Front Work Department, Dorje Rabten, reportedly "educated" the monks to be "patriotic" to China and return to their normal routines.
- As latest news on March 1, several hundred monks from Sey monastery in Ngaba (Chinese: Aba), the Tibetan area of Amdo, protested after officials prevented them from marking a Monlam Chenmo, a major prayer festival that is held after Losar. Monks marched from the monastery after officials banned them from praying, calling to be allowed to celebrate the Monlam prayer festival, and for the authorities to release all Tibetan prisoners from the area. The protest was dispersed when armed police and officials confronted the protestors and troops are surrounding the monastery at the moment.
- This most recent protest comes after an incident on February 27 when Tapey, a monk in his mid-twenties from the same area was shot by Security Personnel after setting himself on fire, following a similar ban on the prayer festival at Kirti monastery in Ngaba, Sichuan province. The Chinese state media Xinhua has confirmed that a monk from Kirti was taken to hospital with burns on his head and neck. The ban on prayer festival reported at Kirti and Sey is a further example of the way in which state repression of religion has created deepening tension in Tibet, the opposite of the 'genuine stability' the Chinese government states it is seeking in Tibet. Last year, the crackdown in this region has particularly severe following a major protest involving monks from Kirti Monastery on March 16 and the presence of troops in the area has stepped up more recently. At least 10 Tibetans – including 16 year old school girl Lhundup Tso – were shot dead last year after police opened fire on unarmed Tibetans who joined the protest on that day.<sup>6</sup>



*Tapey, a monk from Kirti Monastery, is surrounded by police after setting himself on fire in protest, 27 February 2009.*

*continued on page 4*





*Tibetans in Tibet and in exile cancelled the usual celebrations and marked the traditional Tibetan New Year (Losar) in mourning and prayers (Photo: Reuters)*

The Dalai Lama in a New Year message to Tibetan people expressed admiration for the determination of Tibetans in China and urged them to exercise patience from the provocative orders of the authorities.

The Chinese government earlier said that foreign journalists would be welcome in Tibet in March in order to cover an event in March that it has dubbed "Serf Liberation Day." However, the Telegraph says that attempts by journalists to arrange trips to Tibet over the anniversary period were firmly rebuffed. Tourist agencies were contacted on February 18 by officials and told to cancel all trips for the foreseeable future. Officials are wary of March 10 which marks the 50th anniversary of the failed Tibetan uprising against Chinese rule. Last year, protest to mark the anniversary spun out of control, with protests breaking out in the Tibetan capital of Lhasa and all across the Tibetan Plateau. ■

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article5653221.ece>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.savetibet.org/media-center/ict-news-reports/authorities-surround-monastery-issue-48-hour-ultimatum-organizers-surrender-after-latest-p>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.savetibet.org/media-center/inside-tibet-reports/monk-tibet-sets-himself-fire-shot-police-during-protest>

## Rights take second place during Clinton China visit as State Department report finds severe repression in Tibet

In mid February, Hillary Clinton made her first trip to China as Secretary of State. Rights groups, including ICT, submitted a letter to Clinton urging human rights issues as a prominent topic in her public and private discussions with the Chinese leadership and people.<sup>7</sup> With reports of further restrictions and increasing tension in Tibet even during Clinton's visit in China, Mary Beth Markey, Vice President of Advocacy for ICT, said: "China is determined to fuel tensions in Tibet rather than do the work of peaceful conflict resolution with the Dalai Lama. If China's hard-line position on Tibet is immutable, then Secretary Clinton and others deeply concerned for the difficult situation in Tibet - and for peace in stability in China - will have to face a real and significant obstacle to good relationships with China."

The visit was criticized by human rights groups as Clinton dismissed any public discussion on human rights situation and Tibet. When asked what happened to human rights, she said "Human rights are an essential part of U.S. foreign policy" but such concerns can't interfere with other issues, such as cooperation on climate change and economic concerns. Human rights activists accused Clinton of making it easy for China to suppress Tibet and internal protests at will. "She really gave them a completely undeserved and totally unexpected Christmas present," said Sophie Richardson of Human Rights Watch.

However, on 25 February, the US State Department issued its annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2008, in which it found that human rights in Tibet had



*U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton leaves aside long-standing concerns about human rights, during her three day visit to China (Photo: AP)*

"deteriorated severely during the year," and that "official repression of freedoms of speech, religion, association, and movement increased significantly." The report remains critical of China's human rights and cites credible information that more than 200 people were killed, that hundreds were detained or imprisoned amid concerns of torture, and that more than 1000 other people are still unaccounted for. The report also notes that there was no progress in the three rounds of discussions held during 2008 between the Chinese government and representatives of the Dalai Lama.<sup>8</sup> ■

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.savetibet.org/media-center/tibet-news/china-rights-should-top-clinton-agenda>

<sup>8</sup> For more information, see : <http://www.savetibet.org/media-center/ict-press-releases/us-state-department-reports-severe-cultural-and-religious-repression-tibet>