

# Tibet Brief

A report of the International Campaign for Tibet



April 2012

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## Impact of self-immolations grows in Tibet



This image from video, released Friday, March 23, 2012 by London-based activist group Free Tibet, reportedly shows the cremation of Sonam Thargyal, a 44-year-old farmer who doused himself with erosene before setting himself on fire earlier this month.

Thirty-three Tibetans are confirmed to have self-immolated inside Tibet since 2009; twelve in 2011 and twenty since the beginning of 2012. Twenty-three are known to have died after their protest. Furthermore, on 26 March 2012 Jamphel Yeshe set himself on fire near India's parliament in Delhi during a protest against Chinese rule in Tibet and died a few days later.

The majority of self-immolations took place in Ngaba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture (Sichuan province); one took place in Chamdo prefecture in the Tibet Autonomous Region and five in the Tibetan Autonomous areas in Qinghai province.

Most of those who self-immolated were monks or former monks at Kirti monastery in Ngaba, but lay-people also resorted to this extreme form of protest, including Rinchen, mother of three children in her thirties. Tibetans who are self-immolating have made

their motivations clear during the act, calling for freedom and the return of the Dalai Lama. The call for freedom is the final condemnation of a system that withholds fundamental rights to Tibetans. The call for the return or long-life of the Dalai Lama is an assertion of their Tibetan identity. Looking through a longer lens, it is possible to understand these self-immolations as part of a continuum of protests across Tibet since Tibetans rose up in 1959, a revolt against Chinese rule that led to the flight of the Dalai Lama into exile. Policies that on the one hand withhold rights and on the other shake the foundation of Tibetan traditions and livelihoods, like the forced denunciation of the Dalai Lama or the settlement of hundreds of thousands of nomads into 'socialist villages' are an enormous pressure against a Tibetan population with no way to respond within the system.

The Chinese response to the protests so far has been reflexive – a swift crackdown, the use of force to subdue unrest, intimidation, detentions and the like. Yet, the Tibetan self-immolations and the Chinese crackdown do not represent an end-game in Tibet. Tibetans have shown themselves to be resilient and from the Chinese perspective, there are clearly diverse attitudes about rights and governance. The Chinese people are not completely detached from the situation in Tibet. Transformational change in China is the end-game.

Tibetans are demanding the kind of change in Tibet that would allow them



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## Governments and the EU raise concerns about Tibet at U.N. Human Rights Council



UN officials handed over letter from U.N.'s top human rights official to the Tibetan hunger strikers. (Photo: Students for a Free Tibet.)

European governments and the United States raised strong concerns about Tibet in their statements to the U.N. Human Rights Council (19<sup>th</sup> Session, 27 February – 23 March 2012) as part of the key Item 4 "Human rights situations that require the Council's attention." Chinese delegates at the multilateral forum always impose substantial pressure on countries not to raise the situation in Tibet, and deny that there are any human rights abuses in the PRC.

Among the countries raising serious concerns about the current crisis in Tibet at the Human Rights Council were the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Denmark's statement, on behalf of the European Union, was supported by 34 countries, including non-EU members Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Iceland, Serbia, Albania and Liechtenstein.

In addition to voicing criticism and alarm about the violent suppression of Tibetan protests, governments called upon China

to take a variety of steps, such as allowing all Tibetans, including monks, to exercise their cultural and religious rights without hindrance and refraining from the use of force against peaceful protests. A number of states called on the PRC government to improve the human rights situation in Tibet as well as in other parts of China, as a means to ensuring peace and stability. Furthermore, they asked China to reassess policies that undermine Tibetan and Uighur linguistic, religious, and cultural traditions, creating grievances and fostering unrest, and safeguard the civil, political and cultural rights of all its citizens, in line with its international obligations.

The strong response at the Council indicates the gravity of the situation in Tibet, where 33 Tibetans have self-immolated in protest against Chinese government constraints on their fundamental rights and freedoms.

In the same week, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon reacted to a hunger strike by three Tibetans outside

to live freely as Tibetans and the Dalai Lama to return as the embodiment of their identity. This could be achieved by reversing some basic assumptions by the Chinese state about governance and re-envisioning Tibet and the Tibetan Buddhist culture as a precious asset rather than an obstacle to assimilation and one-party rule. The resumption of dialogue between the envoys of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Chinese officials, focused in good faith on the Dalai Lama's 'middle way' approach that seeks genuine autonomy for Tibet within the People's Republic of China, would be a positive response to the current crisis in Tibet. ■

### See also:

- ▶ Self-Immolations Fact Sheet <http://tinyurl.com/3zaoerv>
- ▶ Map of Self-Immolations: <http://tinyurl.com/6vmdmpj>
- ▶ Government Statements on Tibet Immolations and Crisis: <http://tinyurl.com/7jj9vlw>
- ▶ Article by Gillian Wong: <http://tinyurl.com/d3bbju3>

U.N. headquarters in New York. His spokesman Martin Nesirky said that the secretary general affirmed the right of all people to peaceful protest, but he was however very concerned about the health of the hunger striking protesters (see: <http://tinyurl.com/d86qlu2>).

On 12 March, UN Assistant Secretary General Ivan Simonovic met with the three protesters who told him they wanted "concrete action" by the Chinese authorities to ease the ongoing crackdown in their homeland before they would consider ending their hunger strike. Mr. Simonovic said he would convey the group's concerns "to the relevant Special Rapporteur and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva in line with established procedure in line with handling human rights matters." The hunger strike ended on 22 March. ■

### See also:

- ▶ ICT Press Release: <http://tinyurl.com/bmv6bg9>
- ▶ ICT Report: <http://tinyurl.com/c3x7nbz>

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## EU receives petition on Tibet



On the right, EEAS Director for Asia, Gerhard Sabathil; on the left, ICT EU Policy Director Vincent Metten

On 1 February 2012, the International Campaign for Tibet handed over a petition on Tibet signed by **677,569** individuals to representatives of the European External Action Service (EEAS).

The petition is sponsored by Avaaz, a global web movement to bring people-powered politics to decision-making around the world. ICT's Executive Director Tsering Jampa, EU Policy Director Vincent Metten and EU Policy and Advocacy Officer Paola Trevisan were invited to the EEAS Charlemagne building in Brussels, Belgium by Mr. Gerhard Sabathil, Director for Asia, and Mr. Rolf Timans, Head of the Human Rights Unit, to hand over the Tibet petition and discuss the current crisis in Tibet. ■

**The petition is still open to signatures.**

**You can add your name and help to reach 1,000,000 signatures by clicking on**

**<http://tinyurl.com/73x6qqu>.**

## First Tibet Lobby Days in Brussels

In collaboration with the International Tibet Network, ICT's Brussels office organized the first Tibet Lobby Days (20-23 March 2012) in the heart of the European Union (EU) targeting mainly the European Parliament (EP).

Tibetans invited to the Tibet Lobby Days reside in Europe and in most cases have been granted EU citizenship. Thus, they came to Brussels to meet with MEPs from their current European country of residence to ask MEPs to "hear their voices" by meeting and listening to their stories and their messages, and possibly find a way to spread their asks to other EU institutions. As an inaugural event, ICT hosted participants coming from Belgium, Ireland, Poland and the UK, but in 2013 the invitation will be extended to other EU countries.

Participants attended the meeting of the EP Tibet Intergroup and had the possibility to brief attendees to the meeting and listen to the presentation of the Envoy of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Europe, Mr. Kelsang Gyaltsen, who was invited as



Tibetan lobbyists with H.H. the Dalai Lama Envoy for Europe Mr. Kelsang Gyaltsen, Chair of the EP Tibet Intergroup Mr. Thomas Mann MEP and staffers of the Office of Tibet in Brussels.

keynote speaker to the meeting. He presented the proposition for a EU Special Coordinator for Tibetan Affairs, which has been already discussed with several EU Member States and with various members of the European Parliament (EP).

Besides the EP, participants were invited to a lunch hosted by members of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and had the possibility to interact with them. Moreover, they met with a representative of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and learned more about the EU and how it functions, and with staffers of the Office of Tibet in Brussels. ■

### See also:

► Paola Trevisan's blog: <http://tinyurl.com/ccsn9ou>

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## Political prisoners focus

### Khenpo Gyewala

There are updated information about Khenpo Gyewala, a highly-revered abbot and respected scholar at Gyegyel Zogchen Monastery, who had been placed in incommunicado detention for 20 days and then sentenced to two years imprisonment.

According to the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD) Khenpo went 'missing' on 8 March 2012 in Zatoe (Chinese: Zaduo) county in Yulshul (Chinese: Yushu) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province.

According to TCHRD's sources, on 28 March 2012 a relative of Khenpo received a phone call from Zatoe county Public Security Bureau (PSB) office. Khenpo Gyewala was allowed to speak on the phone with his relative, whose identity has not yet been confirmed, for three minutes.

The same sources told TCHRD that during the three-minute phone call, Khenpo asked his relative to look after Monsel School, a school he founded to counter growing illiteracy among local Tibetans. Khenpo also said that he underwent 'enormous hardships' during his detention, but after the sentence he did not face any special problems. However, Khenpo could not name the place where he is imprisoned though sources suspect that the prison is located far away from Tibetan areas. ■

#### See also:

► TCHRD website: <http://tinyurl.com/bqx5ev3>

## This number's reading suggestion

### Human Rights Watch Report "China: Tibetan Monasteries Placed Under Direct Rule"

On 16 March 2012, Human Rights Watch issued a report detailing sweeping powers being used by the Chinese authorities to post government officials to managerial positions in monasteries throughout Tibet. The new regulations transform religious institutions into quasi-administrative units of the Chinese party state. The move represents a dramatic escalation in the Chinese Communist Party and government's attempts to consolidate control over the institutions and practice of Tibetan Buddhism, and conclusively undermines the notion of religious freedom within Tibet's monasteries.

HRW press release and report: <http://www.hrw.org/node/105821>

## Upcoming Events

### ► 19-20 April 2012:

Conference "The EU and China – Partners for a Green World" organized by College of Europe and the Madariaga – College of Europe Foundation, in cooperation with the Committee of the Regions (<http://tinyurl.com/ckmwu3j>)

### ► 23 April 2012:

Foreign Affairs Council will cover EU-China relations

### ► 27-29 April 2012:

World Parliamentary Conference on Tibet, Ottawa (Canada), <http://inpatnet.org/>

### ► 24 May 2012:

Visit of the Dalai Lama to Belgium (Institut Yeunten Ling, Huy) - <http://www.dalailama-2012.be/fr/>



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