

# Tibet Brief

A report of the International Campaign for Tibet



March 2013

## In this issue :

1. ▶ Tibet Solidarity Rally on 10 March in Brussels
2. ▶ Kirti Rinpoche's Europe Tour and China's pressure on Belgium to cancel meetings
3. ▶ US Women of Courage Award delivered to Tibetan blogger and activist Tsering Woeser
4. ▶ EU Tibet Lobby Days
5. ▶ 108 self-immolations in Tibet and China's criminalization measures
6. ▶ New European Parliament's report on EU-China relations
7. ▶ China appoints new TAR governor
8. ▶ Political Prisoners focus
9. ▶ Reading suggestion
10. ▶ Upcoming Events



## Tibet Solidarity Rally on 10 March in Brussels

Over 5,000 people from 17 different European countries came together on 10 March 2013 in Brussels to commemorate the March 10 anniversary of the 1959 Tibet Uprising and the fifth anniversary of the protests that swept across Tibet from March 2008. ICT Europe was in charge of the organization along with Tibetan Communities in Europe, the Swiss Tibetan Friendship Association, Les Amis du Tibet, Vrienden van Tibet as well as the Swiss Tibetan Women's Association.

Tibetans from the different European communities and their supporters gathered to march through the streets of Brussels starting from *Gare du Nord*, passing through the main streets of Brussels' centre and convening at *Mont des Arts*. The audience was then addressed by many different speakers, including **Kirti Rinpoche**, a senior Tibetan lama who lives in exile in India;

**Penpa Tsering**, member of the Tibetan Parliament in exile; MEP and President of the EP's Tibet Intergroup **Thomas Mann** and Mr **Henri Malosse** of the European Economic and Social Committee. The crowd was also entertained by Tibetan singers and rap stars including Swiss Tibetan Karma Emchi, known for his viral hit 'Shapale'. On the occasion of 10 March, which marked the 54<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the

Tibetan National Uprising Day, the first democratically elected prime minister of the Tibetan Government in Exile Dr. Lobsang Sangay released a statement dedicating this important day for Tibetan history to all self-immolators and those who have died for Tibet, and pointing out that the root causes of these deaths are the occupation and repression in Tibet by the PRC. ■



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Rinpoche at the European Parliament

## Kirti Rinpoche's Europe Tour and China's pressure on Belgium to cancel meetings

**Kirti Rinpoche**, who lives in exile in India, arrived in Europe on a visit hosted by ICT to meet with representatives of institutions and Ministries of different countries (Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Kingdom) and to attend the rally held in Brussels on 10 March.

Kirti Rinpoche's visit to Belgium (6-11 March) coincided with hardline statements made by the governor of Ngaba prefecture accusing Kirti monks of collaboration with lamas in exile to incite self-immolations. The wave of self-immolations across Tibet began at Kirti monastery in February 2009, and nearly a third of all the Tibetans who have set fire to themselves since then are from Ngaba (Chinese: Aba).

Following Kirti Rinpoche's arrival in Brussels on 6 March, the Chinese embassy contacted Belgian government officials to complain about senior officials from the Foreign Ministry and the President of the Senate meeting Kirti Rinpoche. As a result, a scheduled appointment at the Foreign Ministry with the Head of the Asia Desk Ms Jehanne Roccas was changed at the last minute to a meeting nearby with a retired ambassador, and the President of the Senate cancelled a meeting with Kirti Rinpoche on 8 March. Instead Kirti Rinpoche met the President of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Mr Karl Vanlouwe. On 26th March, Mr Reynders replied to ICT's letter of complaint without providing any satisfying answer on the reasons behind the decision to change the format and the place of the meeting with Kirti Rinpoche.

Members of the European External Action Service did not cancel meetings with Kirti Rinpoche, despite some pressure

to do so. In 2007, the Belgian government asked the Dalai Lama to cancel a long-planned visit to Brussels in response to pressure from Beijing, following the postponement under similarly controversial circumstances of an earlier visit meant to take place in June 2005.

Vincent Metten, EU Policy Director at ICT Brussels, which is hosting Kirti Rinpoche's visit, said: *"China's strong-arm tactics in seeking to suppress legitimate discussion about the crisis in Tibet are well-known, but it is a shame that the government in Belgium, which is a founding member of the European Union, acquiesced. The Belgian government must be mindful of the message this sends to the Tibetan people as the scale of the tragedy in Tibet continues to unfold. The level of Chinese pressure on Belgium shows how seriously the Chinese government takes the influence of Kirti Rinpoche and what he has to say, as well as its continued intolerance of the support of foreign governments for human rights and the Tibet issue."*

Fortunately Kirti Rinpoche's message has been conveyed strongly to press and politicians, including at the Sub-Committee on Human Rights at the European Parliament on 7 March and at the United Nations in Geneva on 4 March.

Kirti Rinpoche, the head lama of Kirti monastery in Tibet, its sister monastery in India and 40 associated monasteries, has lived in India since he followed the Dalai Lama into exile at the time of the Tibet Uprising in March, 1959. In the 1980s he returned to Tibet and China, where he met many Chinese dignitaries and the former Panchen Lama, who was at the time the most senior religious leader remaining in Tibet and the head of the Tibetan government. ■

## US Women of Courage Award delivered to Tibetan blogger and activist Tsering Woeser



Tsering Woeser

The Tibetan activist, blogger and writer **Tsering Woeser** received the award in absentia, due to the impossibility of travelling. In a ceremony, which took place at the US State Department, First Lady **Michelle Obama** and Secretary of State **John Kerry** presented the 2013

International Women of Courage Award. Since 2007 the award has been presented in recognition of women around the globe who have demonstrated courage and leadership, often at great personal risk, to promote justice and rights. **Tsering Woeser** is among ten awardees this year.

This award is not the first sign of international recognition for the activist, who had already received many other awards in the recent past. In 2011 she was one of 11 laureates of the **Prince Claus Award**, a prize funded by the Dutch government and given yearly to individuals or organizations to honor outstanding achievements in the fields of culture and development. Then, just as now, her presence at the delivery was made impossible by the Chinese authorities who have placed her under house arrest.

Tencho Gyatso, ICT's Special Assistant for Advocacy, said at the award ceremony: "Today, Tibetans everywhere will celebrate Woeser's courage and the decision of the United States to stand with her."

Woeser, who was not issued a passport by Chinese officials, stressed that she considered the prize a proof of international awareness about Tibet and dedicated it to the more than one hundred self-immolators inside Tibet. **Todd Stein**, ICT Director of Government Relations, also emphasized the policy implications of the award, considering it "especially gratifying to witness this high-level and public expression of the U.S. commitment to the Tibetan struggle for rights and dignity."

"With every blog post these women have inspired millions," said First Lady **Michelle Obama** in the remarks made during the prize delivery. When it was **Woeser's** turn, Secretary of State **John Kerry** praised her for a "courageous stand to improve human rights conditions in Tibet" and "for giving eloquent voice to those who otherwise will not be heard." ■

## EU Tibet Lobby Days

For the second consecutive year ICT Brussels organized Tibet Lobby Days with members of Tibetan communities from different European countries in order to brief Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) on the situation in Tibet and to build new alliances with decision-makers.

Tibet Lobby Days are an established advocacy event in the United States organized every year by the ICT US office in collaboration with US-Tibet Support Groups and Tibetan Associations to lobby US Senators and Representatives.

After the 2012 first edition with participants from 4 countries, this year's lobbyists came from 7 European countries (France, Hungary, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom). In collaboration with the International Tibet Network, ICT Brussels organized and coordinated meetings with the offices of 17 different MEPs from 6 – 8 March 2013. These meetings included some "old" friends and supporters of Tibet such as MEP **Edward McMillan-Scott** (UK, ALDE) and MEP



Tibetan lobbyists and ICT's EU Policy Director Vincent Metten gather after the Tibet Intergroup meeting, for a picture with H.E. Kirti Rinpoche and MEP Thomas Mann.

**Jean Lambert** (UK, Greens) as well as new contacts from all main European political groups (EPP, S&D, ALDE, Greens), which gave us the opportunity to spread our network inside the European Parliament.

Participants attended a training day organized by ICT Brussels to introduce them to the European Union's institutions and decision-making processes. Moreover, on 7 March they also participated in a meeting of the EP's Tibet Intergroup, which was addressed by **Kirti Rinpoche**.

This year the Brussels Tibet Lobby Days were organized only a few days ahead of the European demonstration in support of Tibet held on 10 March in order to ensure the lobbyists' participation. ■

## 108 self-immolations in Tibet and China's criminalization measures



Lobsang Thogme, the latest Tibetan self-immolator

The number of self-immolations continues rising with the amount of Tibetans who are known to have set themselves on fire in the PRC since February 2009 going past the one hundred confirmed cases mark. In 2013 alone there have already been thirteen self-immolations (as of 20 March 2013), of which twelve inside Tibet and one in Kathmandu, Nepal, on 13 February.

The two most recent cases of self-immolations reported by ICT are the ones of a 28-year old Kirti monk called Lobsang Thogme who set fire to himself and died on 16 March, the fifth anniversary of a protest in Ngaba (Chinese: Aba), eastern Tibet, in which armed police fired into an unarmed crowd, and a woman called Kunchok Wangmo who set fire to herself in Dzoge and died on 13 March.

Lobsang is the third Tibetan to self-immolate on the anniversary of the crackdown on 16 March 2008, when 18 Tibetans were killed, according to exile sources from Ngaba. The young Kirti monk Lobsang Phuntsog self-immolated on

the same anniversary day in 2011, followed by 20-year old Kirti monk Losang Tsultrim a year later. Lobsang Thogme was from the Trinkon village area of Ngaba (Chinese: Aba) county in Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan province, the Tibetan area of Amdo.

Policy failure in Tibet has not been officially acknowledged by Chinese authorities, who have sought to characterize the self-immolations as imitative, criminal, or misguided acts of "terrorism-in-disguise" and have blamed the Dalai Lama. The Chinese government has responded to self-immolations by intensifying the military buildup in Tibet and strengthening the very policies and measures that are the root cause of the acts in the first place. This response to the self-immolations only makes the situation in Tibet more dangerous, with the risk of more self-immolations.

According to recent news, the Chinese state media announced the detention of seven Tibetans in Gansu who they blame for 'organizing' a self-immolation, saying that they are members of the 'Dalai clique' and the exile activist group the Tibetan Youth Congress, based in India. The strong statement, which appears to be aimed at a Chinese audience, is indicative of an increasingly aggressive strategy of reprisals against friends, family and others who may be connected in some way to Tibetans who self-immolate.

On 31 January 2013 six Tibetans were sentenced by the Sangchu (Ch: Xiahe) County People's Court in Kanlho (Ch: Gannan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu province, to prison terms ranging from 3 to 12 years following the self-immolation and death of Dorje Rinchen on October 23, 2012.

The six Tibetans sentenced are likely to have been included among detentions announced by a senior Chinese official in the state media on January 23. Wei Jianrong, Gannan Prefecture Committee Secretary, reportedly said that: "Since last October, Gannan has successfully dealt with 21 self-immolation incidents [...] 18 cases have been cracked, five cases have been referred to the courts for trial, and 16 people have been arrested for being involved in the organization and planning of self-immolation incidents."

Moreover, on 28 January 2013, a Tibetan monk named Lobsang Kunchok was given a suspended death sentence (likely to be commuted to life), and his nephew Lobsang Tsering was sentenced to 10 years for "intentional homicide" connected to the self-immolation of Tibetans in Ngaba (Chinese: Aba). ■



## New European Parliament's report on EU-China relations

On 14 March 2013 the European Parliament (EP) voted its report on EU-China relations. The Rapporteur in charge of drafting the report was MEP **Bastian Belder** (NL, Europe for freedom and democracy) of the Committee of Foreign Affairs Committee (AFET).

The main positive aspect pointed out in this report is the recent, vast economic development in China that has lifted a large part of the population out of poverty. However, the EP regretted that this was not yet matched by progress with political liberties, human rights and social integration.

The report also stressed that pragmatic cooperation between the EU and China could be fostered through Europe's 2020 Strategy and China's 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan, and called on EU Member States to give the European External Action Service (EEAS), and especially its Delegation in Beijing, a clear mandate to strengthen the EU-China Strategic Partnership by speaking with one voice to the Chinese Government. At the same time the EP also asked the new Chinese leadership to ensure that China's economic success is not undermined by a "red aristocracy of enormously rich party leaders".

The report welcomed the EU-China talks on trade and investments, and particularly the agreements reached during the 15th EU-China Summit held in Brussels on 20 September 2012 regarding the negotiation of an agreement on investment, underlining that the EU wants to step up the dialogue on fighting counterfeiting.

However, the EP also expressed its concerns with regard to the close relations between China and the dictatorial regime of North Korea calling on China to take more responsibility for stability on the Korean Peninsula and resume talks on the North Korean nuclear threat.

Of particular importance for ICT is the chapter on human rights and democracy (paragraphs 21 – 35). As a matter of fact, the EP deplored the unwillingness of the Chinese Government to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the ongoing severe human rights violations with regard to labour rights, press freedom, censorship of the internet and the number of executions under China's death penalty legislation.

The report also highlighted the serious human rights situation in Tibet, mentioning the worrying number of self-immolations in recent years. It pointed out that lasting stability in the autonomous provinces of Tibet and Xinjiang could not be achieved by Tibetan and Uighur peoples' forced assimilation, cultural destruction or repressive police and security methods, but only "by seriously addressing all indigenous complaints in order to create genuinely shared responsibility for the well-being of both autonomous provinces"

In this context the EP once again voiced its concern with regard to the lack of substantial progress and the failure to produce concrete and visible results of the EU-China Human Rights Dialogue, calling on the EEAS, the Council, the Commission and the newly appointed EU Special Representative for Human Rights "to step up their efforts in order to give this process new impetus and make this dialogue more effective and result-oriented". ■

## China appoints new TAR chairman, Losang Jamcan

**Losang Jamcan** already served as Vice-chairman under the previous chairman, Pema Thinley. He had also been Mayor of Lhasa between 1996 and 2003. A hard-line member of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), his election is not expected to bring changes to the Chinese rule in Tibet.

On 29 January 2013 **Losang Jamcan**, also spelt **Losang Gyaltzen**, was elected the new chairman of the Tibet Autonomous Region. In the exercise of his functions, Jamcan will be reporting to Tibet's top official, Communist Party chief **Chen Quanguo**.

**Jamcan** told the press that all development and progress of Tibet since its peaceful liberation is the result of sticking to the leadership of the CCP. The new governor is also known to have said the government would continue to protect harmony and stability in Tibet, namely through a resolute struggle against exiled Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama. These declarations seem to be a first indication that he intends on closely following the Chinese governments' official policy in Tibet.

Commenting on the political consequences of this election for Tibet, renowned Tibetan blogger and activist **Tsering Woeser** reinforced this idea, stating that "He's rather hard-line, but all officials at that level are the same", while also adding that "there will be no real change in Tibet."

ICT's Director of Communications, **Kate Saunders**, stated it would not be surprising if at the beginning of his tenure things might get worse, as he will want to stamp his authority early on. ■

See also: ► [European Parliament resolution of 14 March 2013 on EU-China relations](#)

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## Political prisoners focus

### Lobsang Kunchok



On January 28, 2013, Tibetan monk Lobsang Kunchok, from the Kirti Monastery, was given a suspended death sentence for "intentional homicide" connected to the self-immolation of Tibetans in Ngaba (Chinese: Aba). He is now expected to remain in prison as suspended death sentences are usually commuted to life

sentences, unless the prisoner is alleged to have committed a crime in the first two years of his sentence.

Kunchok's was the most severe of 8 sentences given by the Chinese authorities in an attempt to criminalize self-immolations (see the article in this edition) and all those connected to them. In a judicial process surrounded by controversy, as even the PRC's official press agency Xinhua acknowledged that Kunchok was not represented by his own lawyers, and despite an assertion by a judge who told the Global Times that: "authorities obtained sufficient evidence showing it [the alleged crimes] had been instructed by 'forces from abroad'," no evidence whatsoever was presented to justify the sentencing. Moreover, Kunchok was accused of inciting eight self-immolations of which only 3 took place. ■

## Upcoming Events

- **10 April 2013:** European Parliament's event "Tears of Tibet", Brussels (sponsored by MEPs Kristiina Ojuland and Leonidas Donskis, ALDE group)

To register to this event, please [click here](#)

## This number's reading suggestion

### Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines: "Tibet is burning. Self-Immolation: Ritual or Political Protest?"

The *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* is a twice-yearly journal published by the French Centre de recherche sur les civilisations de l'Asie Orientale in Paris. The Director of the journal is Dr. Jean-Luc Achard, and the editorial board includes Drs. Anne Chayet and Pierre Arènes.

The latest number was published in December 2012 and focuses on the issue of self-immolations. It is the result of an international conference held on 14 and 15 May 2012 at the Collège de France, in Paris. It includes papers from the Tibetan studies community on self-immolations, highlighting the ethno-nationalistic aspect of the subject and some of the reactions the phenomenon has set off. Moreover, some of the articles included in this number also focus on the Chinese government's reaction to self-immolations, raising the question of whether it shows any adaptation to these unprecedented events, or if it conforms to the well-known political ritual of repression used in the 1980s Tibetan protests. Additionally, the three last contributions by Tibetologists deal with Tibetan bloggers' and social media reactions to self-immolations. ■

To date, twenty-five volumes of the journal are available [as a free PDF downloads](#).