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China's first counter-terror law and its implications for Tibet



Police techniques for dealing with protestors being demonstrated at the Kardze counter-terrorist military drill. Image from Chinese state media.

On 27 December, 2015, China passed its first counter-terror law, rejecting concerns from international governments that draconian measures in the name of national security are being used to crack down on Tibetans, Uyghurs and Chinese civil society, and to undermine religious freedom.

According to a [report](#) by the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT), the new law, that came into effect on January 1, 2016, will form the blueprint for China's counter-terrorism strategy. It follows the imposition of oppressive and counter-productive policies in Tibet and Xinjiang, involving extra-judicial killings, torture and imprisonment, and crackdowns on even the mildest expressions of religious identity and culture. An aggressive 'counter-terrorism' drive in Tibet with a strong political dimension has involved an expansion of militarisation across the plateau, despite the absence of any

violent insurgency in Tibet.

The broad and vague language of the law increases the impunity of the Chinese Party State and attributes huge discretionary powers to both the State organs and security forces. It is feared this may result in human rights abuses, particularly in Xinjiang and Tibet. Furthermore, in linking 'terrorism' with an undefined 'extremism' linked to religion, it gives an even larger scope for the penalisation of almost any peaceful expression of Tibetan identity, acts of non-violent dissent, or criticism of ethnic

or religious policies, in a political climate in which the exiled Dalai Lama has been accused of inciting terrorism through self-immolations, and even terror through his teachings.

Concern about the implications of the new counter-terror legislation was raised at the [34th EU-China human rights dialogue](#) on 30 November-1 December (2015) in Beijing, and by the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, Stavros Lambrinidis, on his [second official China visit](#) in November 2015.

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Members of the European Parliament also expressed concern about the new law (at that time in draft form) in a report adopted in December 2015 (see

below paragraph), saying: "In recent years China's anti-terrorism policy has evolved rapidly from a reactive 'defence against terror' approach to a proactive

'war on terror', along with permanent 'crisis management' entailing action to an unprecedented extent in affected regions and in society." ■

European Parliament report on EU-China relations deplores deteriorating human rights situation in Tibet and China



MEP Bas Belder (Netherlands, European Conservatives and Reformists Group) presenting the report on EU-China relations to the European Parliament on 15 December.

A major debate in the European Parliament on 15 December, 2015, was followed by the adoption of a report by more than 500 MEPs expressing serious concern about human rights in Tibet and China.

The [report on EU-China relations](#) drafted by MEP Belder (Netherlands, European Conservatives and Reformists Group) followed the second visit to China of the EU Special Representative for Human Rights Mr Stavros Lambrinidis and the 34th EU-China Human Rights dialogue on 30 November in Beijing. Members of the European Parliament expressed serious concerns about the overall degradation of the human rights situation in Tibet and China and about worrying developments such as the Foreign NGO Management and the counter-terrorism draft laws, the lack of access to Tibet and anti Dalai

Lama campaigns, as well as the lack of religious freedom, the criminalisation of self-immolations, forced nomad resettlements, the use of torture and the degradation of the environment on the Tibetan Plateau.

ICT noted with interest the recommendation on travel restrictions to Tibet imposed to EU citizens: «*no such restrictions apply to Chinese citizens (including diplomats and journalists) across EU Member States; strongly urges therefore that steps be taken to enforce the principle of reciprocity*». This position echoes the US Congress bill introduced

by Representatives Jim McGovern and Joseph Pitts on 26 February, 2015, known as the [Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act 2015](#). The legislation would deny access to the United States of Chinese officials responsible for creating or administering policies on travel to Tibetan areas until China eliminates discriminatory restrictions on access by Americans to Tibet.



The hemicycle of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

In its [Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World 2014 and the European Union's policy on the matter](#), adopted on 17 December, the European Parliament noted the lack of results from the human rights dialogues with China, and called on the EEAS to profoundly rethink its human rights strategy regarding China.

A video recording of the debate on EU-China relations in the European Parliament on 15 December is available [here](#). ■

News of the Dalai Lama's medical treatment prompts long life prayers in Tibet



More than 1,000 Tibetans gathered in a monastery in the Tibetan area of Kham to pray for the Dalai Lama's long life in response to news that he is receiving routine medical treatment in the US.

Responding to the news that the Dalai Lama was receiving medical treatment in the United States, hundreds of Tibetans gathered on 25 January in the eastern Tibetan area of Kham and prayed for his long life, displaying large images of the exiled Tibetan leader.

Images and footage circulating online showed more than 1,000 monks, lay people and children participating in a prayer ceremony near the Chogri monastery in Trehor township, Kardze Prefecture (Chinese: Ganzi), to pray for the Dalai Lama. The crowd seated before a large shrine, chanted the long life prayer for the Dalai Lama, and a large image of the Tibetan spiritual leader in exile was placed on the shrine, surrounded in khatags (white blessing scarves) and offerings.

The ceremony was held following news of the Dalai Lama's admission for medical treatment at the Mayo Clinic in the United States. In and out of Tibet, news of such a rare and bold public gathering spread widely on social media

platforms. Despite this, no on-the-spot detentions or arrests were made by the local authorities in Trehor.

However, according to information received by the [Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy](#), two high-ranking monks of the Chogri Monastery, Abbot Pagah and Geshe Orgyen, were detained in the first week of February, apparently in connection with the ceremony. Local authorities have also deployed a large number of Chinese security forces to monitor and control both the monastic and lay community in Trehor, and shopkeepers in Kardze were ordered by the authorities to hand over all photos of the Dalai Lama. 'Severe punishment' was threatened for those who failed to comply by 2 February, 2016. ■

Political Prisoner Focus

Tashi Dondhup

In December 2015, news emerged of the detention of Tashi Dhondup, a young Tibetan in Dzoerge (Chinese: Ruo'ergai) county town on 19 December, for wearing traditional Tibetan dress, carrying a photograph of the Dalai Lama and displaying a Buddhist flag on his back. Footage circulating on social media shows him running and walking along the street bearing a large picture of the exiled religious leader. According to Tibetan sources, he was detained by armed police shortly after the footage was shot and his current whereabouts is unknown.

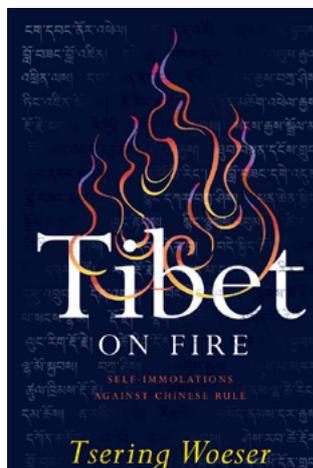


Tashi Dhondup, who demonstrated in Dzoerge, Ngaba, on 19 December. This image, circulating on social media, appears to have been taken before his protest and shows him holding the image of the Dalai Lama he displayed during his solo protest.

Tashi Dhondup was born in Thangkor Township, Dzoerge County, Ngaba Tibetan and Qiang Prefecture in Sichuan, the Tibetan area of Amdo. He is the 14th lone protester in Ngaba prefecture documented by Tibetan sources since July 2015. These solo protests have led to an intensified security crackdown in the area. In Ngaba county town, Internet services were cut on 10 September to everyone except government offices, according to Kirti monks in exile and other sources. In addition, surveillance was stepped-up in an already oppressive atmosphere. ■

UPCOMING EVENTS

- ▶ **29 FEBRUARY > 24 MARCH 2016**
UN Human Rights Council 31st session
- ▶ **10 MARCH 2016**
13H00-14H00
Side event to the UN Human Rights Council on "China's new law on counter-terrorism and its impact on human rights" (Palais des Nations room XXVII)
- ▶ **10 MARCH 2016**
Tibetan uprising day (demonstration in Brussels)
- ▶ **20 MARCH 2016**
Second and final round of the elections of Tibetan leadership in exile



Reading Suggestion

Tibet on Fire: Self-Immolations Against Chinese Rule, by Tsering Woeser

*Publisher: Verso Books
1st edition, 12 January 2016*

Since the 2008 uprising, nearly 150 Tibetans have set fire to themselves in protest at the Chinese occupation of their country. Most have died from their wounds. 'If Tibetans saw even a sliver of an opportunity to hold demonstrations, then they would not resort to self-immolation,' Tsering Woeser, the dissident Tibetan poet, wrote in the New York Times. The Tibetans she references includes herself: a prominent voice of the Tibetan movement, and one of the few Tibetan authors to write in Chinese, Woeser has been placed under house arrest and lives under close surveillance. Tibet On Fire is her account of the oppression Tibetans face, and the ideals driving both the self-immolators and other Tibetans like herself.

With a cover image designed by the renowned Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei, Tibet on Fire is an angry and forceful read: a clarion call for the world to take action.

Cartoon by Fifi

A cartoon by Belgian artist Fifi (Philippe Sadzot) about the new Chinese law on counter-terrorism (copyrights ICT)



HE WAS PROBABLY PLANNING A TERRORIST ATTACK