

Tibet

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PRESS WATCH

INSIDE:

- Tibetans Compelled to Return Home from Kalachakra
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SPRING 2017

*A publication of the
International Campaign for Tibet*

INTERNATIONAL
**CAMPAIGN
FOR TIBET**



A SPIRITUAL TEACHING TRANSMITTED ACROSS THE WORLD

THE DALAI LAMA DELIVERS HIS 34TH KALACHAKRA EMPOWERMENT IN BODH GAYA, INDIA

From the President



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Dear Friends,

The last time I wrote to you in these pages, a new U.S. President was about to take office. As the Trump administration enters its fourth month, our priority now is to maintain consistent, bipartisan support for Tibet in the halls of government.

Despite great uncertainty surrounding the new administration's foreign policy, so far, we have been encouraged by the positive reception we have encountered in dozens of meetings ICT's team has organized in both the House and Senate. We have also reached out to the presidential transition team to brief team members and ensure that key positions in the White House and State Department have the correct information with regard to the current situation inside Tibet.

During the weeks before the confirmation hearing for Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, we worked hard to make sure that Senators would pose questions about U.S. policy on Tibet and receive his written answers, which are discussed on page 3 of this issue. We were happy to receive Secretary Tillerson's pledge to uphold the basic tenets of U.S. policy on Tibet, including his commitment to meet with His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

The full implementation of the U.S. Tibetan Policy Act is at the core of long-standing U.S. bipartisan support for Tibet and we will continue to work to make sure that human rights are respected in Tibet. That is why it is more important than ever that you make your voice heard by signing our petition on page 11, asking Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to begin his term with a strong message to China that political prisoners like Migmar Dhondup must be released. Don't miss the spotlight on ICT member Michael Lichter (page 10), a personal friend of Migmar.

Our feature story this issue covers the major Kalachakra teaching offered by His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Bodh Gaya, India, this January. Unfortunately, as many as seven thousand Tibetans who had traveled to Bodh Gaya were compelled to return home under threats to their families and livelihoods. Read the in-depth account on pages 4-5.

In spite of ongoing opposition from China, we are feeling energized about what the future holds for Tibet.


In March, I traveled to Dharamsala to deliver the final report of the 2016 Tibetan Election Observation Mission to the Tibetan Parliament in Exile. This report was the result of our trip last March with a delegation that visited the Tibetan community in India to observe the elections for the Sikyong and Tibetan Parliament. It contains an analysis of compliance with international democratic election standards and details the delegation's observations and recommendations, aimed at making the electoral process even stronger. While in Dharamsala, we hosted a roundtable discussion with twenty Tibetan NGOs and were heartened to see the increasing engagement of Tibetan civil society in the democratic process in exile.

As we go to print, hundreds of Tibetans and Tibet supporters have just converged on Washington for Tibet Lobby Day, visiting 250+ representatives over a two-day period on Capitol Hill and bringing their energy and enthusiasm to our cause.

And if you haven't seen it yet, I encourage you to watch the March 5 segment on Tibet on *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* (page 9)—a humorous take on a very serious situation that has helped captivate interest and attention for Tibet. Millions of people worldwide have already watched it!

I thank you for your continued solidarity with our Tibetan brothers and sisters as we redouble our efforts this year.

In solidarity,


Matteo Mecacci

Cover Photo: His Holiness the Dalai Lama greets ICT Board Chairman Richard Gere on January 6 at the Kalachakra Empowerment teaching in Bodh Gaya, India. Photo by: Tenzin Choejor/OHHDL

New Administration

Secretary of State Tillerson Says He is Committed to Promoting Dialogue on Tibet and Receiving the Dalai Lama



In response to written questions posed by members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Mr. Rex Tillerson, who received Senate confirmation as Secretary of State on February 1, 2017, has said that he will commit to encouraging dialogue on Tibet and to receiving His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Secretary Tillerson also expressed concern for the restrictions imposed by China on reporters, civil society actors, diplomats and others in accessing Tibet, for the denial of visas to foreign journalists and the limitations to freedom of movement and information. He responded affirmatively to the question whether he would consider “problematic” the above-mentioned restrictions, when compared with the free access to the United States provided to Chinese officials and Chinese state-controlled media.

Furthermore, Tillerson committed to make an assessment of U.S. policy for providing visas to Chinese officials, and to adopt “the best policy, recognizing that reciprocity in treatment is a principal in bilateral relations.”

The International Campaign for Tibet welcomes the commitments made by now Secretary Rex Tillerson on Tibet and the Dalai Lama. They reflect the views of the American public, which has consistently been supportive of the Dalai Lama’s vision for Tibet.

→ Visit <http://bit.ly/tillerson-tibet> to read the full text of the questions for the record on Tibet and Secretary Tillerson’s answers.

ICT Leadership Meets with Members of House and Senate to Rally Support for Tibet Under New Administration



Senator Bob Corker
@SenBobCorker

Follow

Appreciate Richard Gere and @SaveTibetOrg stopping by the office today to discuss their work on behalf of the Tibetan people.



ICT Board Chairman Richard Gere, President Matteo Mecacci, and Penpa Tsering, Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in North America, visited Capitol Hill on February 28 and March 1 to organize a fresh push for Tibet with the new Administration and Congress during the year to come. They met with Senators Bob Corker, Ben Cardin, Marco Rubio, John McCain, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, and Representatives Eliot Engel and Jim McGovern, among others.

Meeting Between Dalai Lama Representative and California Congressman Arranged by Tibetan American Citizen

On January 19, 2017, Tibetan American Thupo Tulkus, based in Santa Barbara, California, facilitated a meeting between Penpa Tsering, Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in North America, and Congressman Salud Carbajal. According to a report from *Voice of America* (VOA), the meeting was the result of Tulkus’s outreach to Carbajal and advocacy for Tibet over the past four years.

The meeting was also attended by ICT President Matteo Mecacci and Vice President Bhuchung Tsering, who along with Penpa Tsering briefed the Congressman on conditions inside Tibet, including human rights violations, self-immolation protests, and the destruction of the Larung Gar Buddhist Institute.

VOA reported that Congressman Carbajal “expressed his support and concern for the human rights situation inside Tibet.”



Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in North America meets Congressman Salud Carbajal.

Dalai Lama's Kalachakra Teaching



China Calls the Dalai Lama's Kalachakra Teaching in India "Illegal" and Compels Tibetans to Return Home

From January 10 to 14, 2017, His Holiness the Dalai Lama delivered his thirty-fourth Kalachakra Empowerment teaching in Bodh Gaya, India, the site of the Buddha's enlightenment 2,500 years ago.

Thousands of Tibetan pilgrims were compelled by the Chinese authorities to return to Tibet after travelling to India to attend a major teaching by His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Bodh Gaya, a sacred Buddhist site in India. This followed systematic measures in Tibet to prevent them travelling out of the country at all, even though many had spent years obtaining passports for legal travel.

The Chinese state media denied reports that Tibetans were compelled to return but said that the government certainly "does not encourage" them to attend, because "the India-based ceremony frequently degenerates into a political tool," according to the *Global Times* on January 5. Other reports state that the Kalachakra, a major religious empowerment attended by more than 200,000 people from 95 countries, has been characterized by the Chinese authorities as "illegal."

This marked the most systematic crackdown so far linked to a teaching by the Dalai Lama in exile, following a trend of increasingly hard-line steps targeting continued devotion to His

Holiness within Tibet, while the Chinese authorities are unable to undermine his high global profile. In 2012, the Chinese authorities launched a major operation to detain Tibetans attending the last Kalachakra in Bodh Gaya, disappearing many pilgrims for weeks or months on their return, and holding them for long periods for "re-education" in military camps and other facilities. In July 2014, when the Dalai Lama conferred another Kalachakra initiation in Ladakh, India for the first time, the religious teachings were described by the Chinese state as an incitement to "hatred" and "extremist action."

Kalon Karma Gelek Yuthok, Chairman of the Kalachakra Organising Committee, said that the number compelled to return totaled nearly 7,000. A Tibetan in Bodh Gaya told ICT: "The Chinese authorities are using methods that show they really know how to hurt people and force them to go home. Monks have been told that if they do not return home, they will have to leave their monasteries. With others, when warnings that they will lose their pension or job do not work, they threaten their families. Even if they do not care what

Above Photo: Tenzin Nyibum Photography

“There will be change in Tibet. Tibetans who came here to attend the Kalachakra Empowerment were called home. Some officials in Tibet referred to the Empowerment as illegal—according to what legal system, I wonder? What they said was just an opinion. Nevertheless, Tibetans were warned that if they didn’t return in time, they would face trouble or their relatives would face penalties. This kind of action contributes nothing to social harmony, it is just disruptive.”

HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA,
SPEAKING PRIOR TO THE LONG LIFE OFFERING ON JANUARY 14

happens to them[selves], because being at the Kalachakra in the presence of His Holiness is so important, they obviously cannot accept that.”

Several hundred Tibetans who had reached Dharamsala, India before attending the Kalachakra were able to receive audiences with the Dalai Lama before they left, but many others were unable to do so. Another Tibetan at the Kalachakra in Bodh Gaya told ICT: “In the days before the Kalachakra ceremony began, it was unbearable to witness the distress of Tibetans who were receiving calls from their families in Tibet to tell them about the threats. Tibetan pilgrims were sobbing and holding onto each other, so heartbroken to have to leave before His Holiness even arrived.”

On January 24, *Voice of America* reported that upon their return to China, the passports of Tibetan attendees were torn, making them invalid, as they reached Dendhu (Chengdu) airport in Sichuan Province and other airports in the country.

Even Chinese people attending the Kalachakra faced pressure. Two Chinese devotees in Bodh Gaya said that they received calls warning them to return home or their passports would be confiscated.

“This shows once again the disregard for religious freedom by Beijing, whose oppressive policies are only increasing tensions in Tibet. We call on all governments who respect religious freedom, to closely monitor the situation inside Tibet...urge China to stop this nonsensical decades long oppression, and embrace the message of tolerance and compassion of the Dalai Lama,” said Matteo Mecacci, ICT President.

This is the first Kalachakra in exile for which the Central Tibetan Administration is one of the main sponsors. At a press conference in Bodh Gaya on January 8, 2017, Sikyong Lobsang Sangay told journalists: “Getting passports is legal, getting visas is also legal, going to Buddhist sites [such as Bodh Gaya] is legal, so for the



Chinese authorities to threaten them to return under such severe pressure is simply unacceptable.”

The Sikyong said that the Kalachakra at Bodh Gaya this year was special not only for spiritual reasons, but also “because of the pressure put on people coming to Bodh Gaya. So Tibetans who have had to go home [even so] are silently and quietly participating in the religious rituals. As His Holiness has said from the ground of Bodh Gaya, they will receive the Kalachakra inside Tibet as well. [And] it is not only a spiritual transmission from Bodh Gaya to Tibet, but it is transmitted across the world.”

Destruction at Larung Gar Intensifies



One of the world's largest Buddhist study centers, the Larung Gar Buddhist Institute in the Eastern Tibetan region of Kham (today administered by China's Sichuan Province) has recently been subject to renewed and accelerated demolition efforts by Chinese authorities.

The latest demolitions at Larung Gar, begun in July 2016, were first outlined in an order issued by the county government—which stated that homes for all but 5,000 monks, nuns, and lay people would be demolished, and that, “By September 30, 2017 the population of the encampment must be limited to 5,000 persons.” This number represents fully half of the previous occupancy. It now seems that authorities are trying to complete demolitions and expulsions by the end of July 2017, or perhaps even sooner.

The number of students now remaining at Larung Gar is still unclear, though almost all monks and nuns coming originally from areas of Tibet other than Kardze and Ngaba have been removed and sent back to their native regions, according to various sources.

Local authorities denied the destruction of the institute, describing the demolitions as a “construction development” that is part of a process of “accelerated urbanization” toward “a more orderly, beautiful, secure and peaceful land.”

A drive to increase and develop tourism is part of the context behind the demolitions at Larung Gar.

A retired Tibetan government official in a small town near Serta told ICT: “Tibet is being turned into a huge tourist destination. Religious activities will be increasingly minimized and contained in monasteries. These will be limited in terms of demography and housing. This is the main objective of the Chinese government with regards to Buddhism, and we Tibetans have no power to influence any of these plans. The Chinese government is and continues to be atheist and for the Communist Party, religion has little to do with prosperity and development in a modern society. Guesthouses and fancy hotels inside and immediately outside monastic environments will grow to host more and more Chinese tourists, with the purpose of improving the local economy and at the same time detracting time from monastics’ education and activities. After all, this is what [the government and the Communist Party] care about. This already happened at Kumbum [Ch. Ta’ersi monastery], and the great monasteries in Lhasa [Sera, Drepung, and Ganden monasteries].”

NEW REPORT

A new ICT report titled *Shadow of Dust Across the Sun* details the destruction of the Larung Gar Buddhist Institute by Chinese officials. Published in March, the report is available in full at <http://bit.ly/shadow-of-dust>.

Focus on Political Prisoners



TASHI WANGCHUK

Detained since January 2016

Tashi Wangchuk is an advocate for Tibetan language education who was reportedly indicted on charges of separatism in January 2017. Mr. Wangchuk is currently awaiting trial in Yulshul (Chinese: Yushu) Prefecture in the Kham region of eastern Tibet (in Qinghai

province). He has been detained since January 27, 2016, following the release of a *New York Times* video (“A Tibetan’s Journey for Justice”) profiling his attempts to request additional Tibetan language classes at schools in the Yulshul region. The video documented his journey to Beijing in 2015 to try to file a lawsuit against Yushu officials for not properly supporting the Tibetan language.

Chinese authorities have charged him with inciting separatism but have provided no evidence in support.

Tashi Wangchuk told the *New York Times* that one of the reasons he sought to highlight the importance of language was because he could not find a place where his two teenage nieces could continue studying Tibetan, after officials forced an informal school run by monks in his area to stop offering language classes for lay people. “Tashi Wangchuk should be allowed to return home immediately and must be cleared of these charges,” said ICT President Matteo Mecacci in a press release calling for Tashi Wangchuk’s immediate release.



LABRANG JIGME

Recently released from prison

Labrang Jigme, a respected scholar monk from Labrang in Amdo, endured torture and nearly died following several periods in prison. He was released in October after serving nearly five years, and immediately hospitalized. A popular writer and intel-

lectual, he is the only known Tibetan to record on video—in Tibet—an account of his own imprisonment and views on Chinese policies against the Dalai Lama in which he gave his full identity.

Images are circulating online of a handwritten letter in Tibetan dated November 26, 2016, in which he writes of his continued determination and spirit in the face of severe oppression. “They frame us with the greatest and heaviest crimes, and under trial they coax or even force us to admit to many things we never did, an ongoing process of rendering us lifeless as a corpse, if not wiping us out altogether,” Labrang Jigme writes. “You can say, ‘They can do nothing to change my powers of reasoning or my innermost commitment,’ but rather, for the sake of sincere adherence to the truth, I found strength, capacity, courage and endurance I didn’t know I had before, which I firmly believe to be the force of truth and reason.”



A full translation of the text of the note, which was written a month after his release from his most recent prison sentence, can be found at <http://bit.ly/message-of-courage>.

Self-Immolation Report

One confirmed self-immolation has occurred since our last report, bringing the total to 146 self-immolations since 2009. Each issue, we present with sadness those individuals who have most recently chosen this act of protest.

December 8, 2016

A Tibetan man in his 30s who has been named as Tashi Rabten was heard calling for the Dalai Lama to return to Tibet as he set fire to himself and died in Machu (Chinese: Maqu) in Gansu, the Tibetan area of Amdo. Video and images depicted a body engulfed in flames with a young boy looking on, and a woman standing nearby reciting prayers. A second video circulating on social media shows police arriving to take away the body.

Wellbeing: Deceased

The most up-to-date information and analysis on the self-immolations inside Tibet is available at savetibet.org

The Tibetan Losar Altar and Its Symbolism for the New Year

BY BHUCHUNG K. TSERING,
VICE PRESIDENT OF ICT



Yangki Ackerman, an ICT Member since 2000, shares her home Losar altar in this photo. Yangki is a Tibetan who now resides in Laguna Hills, CA.

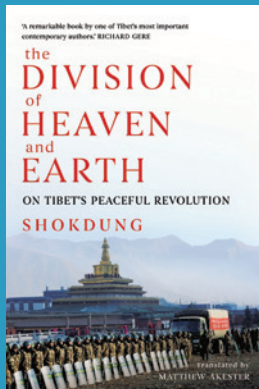
Traditional Tibetan society was pastoral and agricultural, and so many of the Tibetan religious and secular customs trace their origins to these fields. Among the many festivals for the Tibetan people, Losar (New Year) is the one that carries much symbolism, whether in terms of rituals of banishing away negativity on the eve of Losar to items specially prepared for display during the Losar festivity.

The special altar display, known in Tibetan as *Derkha*, is among these. It is the most visible symbol of the New Year festivity in Tibetan homes. The traditional offerings include a sheep's head (now only a fake one), highlighting the nomadic background of Tibetan society, along with barley, wheatgrass, tea, butter, and salt, all symbolizing nourishment, sustainability, and a bountiful harvest for the coming year.

ITEMS ON THE *DERKHA* GENERALLY INCLUDE:

- **A photo of one's spiritual teacher:** Most families will have a photo of His Holiness the Dalai Lama
- **Lo-phue (fresh sprouted wheat):** Symbolizing fresh growth for a good harvest season
- **Food and drink offerings:** Quintessential food offerings include a big stack of fried cookies of many shapes and sizes, Chaang (Tibetan barley or rice wine), butter, salt, and brick tea
- **Druso Chemar:** A decorated box with one part filled with barley and the other with Tsampa
- **Seven offering bowls:** Filled with offerings symbolizing auspiciousness
- **Flowers:** Symbolizing beauty and the offering of one's heart
- **Lug-go (sheep's head):** An offering symbolizing the invocation of health and abundance for nomadic tribes, the sheep's head is traditionally made as a butter sculpture
- **Dried barley stalks:** A symbol of abundance of good crop

RECENT PUBLICATIONS OF NOTE

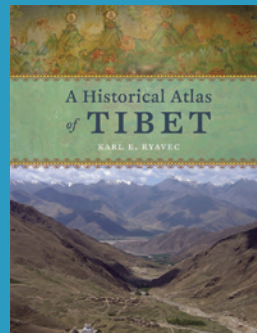


THE DIVISION OF HEAVEN AND EARTH: ON TIBET'S PEACEFUL REVOLUTION

SHOKDUNG, TRANSLATION
BY MATTHEW AKESTER

Shokdung, a prominent young Tibetan writer, traces the roots of nonviolent resistance all the way from Plato and Socrates to Henry David Thoreau and Gandhi in this newly translated book. Written in reaction to the 2008 Tibetan uprising, the book's careful academic style

belies the fact that Shokdung spent six months in a detention center for writing it. He contests false Chinese narratives on the Tibetan uprising, which portrayed it as a violent riot, and says instead: "The cause of the Tibetans is about respect for the principles of universal values, the core of human liberty, and the aspiration for a mutually beneficial and peaceful solution, with none of the animosity that will lead to ruin for both sides."



A HISTORICAL ATLAS OF TIBET

KARL E. RYAVEC

This new release packs fifty maps of Tibet into one over-size book. It benefits from years of research by Ryavec, whose explanations bring Tibet's historical, cultural, and religious trends to life in the pages following each map. He charts the expansion of Buddhism in Tibet, the advance and retreat of Tibetan kingdoms, and the physical attributes of the Tibetan plateau, among much more. *A Historical Atlas of Tibet* is highly recommended for anyone interested in a wealth of visual data on Tibetan history, and for those who simply love detailed maps and beautiful photographs of Tibet.

Recent News

Chinese Diplomat Fails to Disrupt UN Tibet Briefing

On March 10, Vincent Metten, ICT's EU Policy Director, spoke as a panelist at a briefing on Tibet titled "Human Rights in China" that was held as a side event to the 34th session of the UN Human Rights Council. The briefing, which was attended by three Chinese diplomats, included a screening of the *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* segment on Tibet and a film about the destruction at Larung Gar. At the conclusion, a female Chinese diplomat expressed outrage that a Tibetan participant was videotaping and photographing the briefing and attempted to bring a UN security official to confiscate the recordings. However, UN security confirmed that the recordings were legal and the briefing open to the public and refused to take any action.

Tenzin Dorjee Becomes First Tibetan American Commissioner of the U.S. International Religious Freedom Commission



In a historic first, Dr. Tenzin Dorjee, a Tibetan American, has been appointed as a Commissioner of the bipartisan U.S. International Religious Freedom Commission. This federal government commission was created by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act, which monitors the universal right to freedom of religion or belief abroad. It

makes policy recommendations to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress.

Dr. Dorjee is Associate Professor at the Department of Human Communication Studies, California State University at Fullerton. In reaction to his appointment, Dr. Dorjee said, "I look at my position as a vital platform to provide an all-inclusive-secular ethics perspective of His Holiness the Dalai Lama as well as unique Tibetan Buddhist perspective and voice on global religious freedom and rights."

Above Photo: Dr. Tenzin Dorjee is honored at a reception hosted by ICT.

Last Week Tonight Airs In-Depth Segment on Tibet



On March 5, *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* aired an in-depth segment on Tibet in which host John Oliver humorously but effectively distilled the situation in Tibet and interviewed His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The award-winning late-night show, which averages 5.6 million viewers, tackled decades of injustice, occupation, and oppression in a 19-minute news segment in which host John Oliver traveled all the way to Dharamsala to meet with His Holiness. Their conversation touched on the Chinese government and the future of the Dalai Lama, among other topics, and was both amusing and enlightening.

ICT provided critical background information for the segment. Following its airing, we expressed thanks to John Oliver for bringing the crisis in Tibet to the world's attention via an electronic message from members commending his journalistic bravery. The segment can be viewed at <http://bit.ly/ict-john-oliver>.

Please note, Last Week Tonight is a late-night cable TV program with adult content. It may not be suitable for (or in the taste of) all audiences.

Rowell Fund for Tibet Announces 2017 Grantees

The Board of Advisors of the Rowell Fund for Tibet has selected 10 Tibetan grantees for financial support totaling \$34,500 for 2017. Founded in 2003 in cooperation with ICT and in memory of Galen and Barbara Rowell, the Fund supports the work of Tibetans communicating issues of importance to broader Tibetan or international audiences.

The 2017 grants will support: conservation of Tibet House Museum (catalog of objects in the museum) in New Delhi, India; preservation of Dromo Labrang Museum and Library in Kalimpong, India; archival of religious history (publishing books on historical and holy sites of Western Tibet), Nepal; nurturing children's book writers and illustrators, Dharamsala, India; establishing a children's library in Mungod, India; Tibetan Women's Football Camp, Dharamsala, India; Tibetan Wedding Culture Preservation Project, Nepal; Nature Trail: Exploring the Natural World (outdoor education program), New Delhi, India; and two confidential projects.

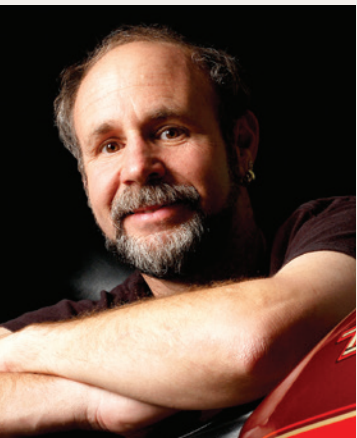


In Memoriam

TIBETAN BUDDHIST SCHOLAR GELEK RIMPOCHE: 1939-2017

ICT was saddened to learn of the passing of Gelek Rimpoche, a Buddhist scholar and an eminent master born in Lhasa. Recognized as an incarnate lama at the age of four, Rimpoche was renowned for his scholarship. He was a friend of ICT, serving on our Advisory Board and taking time whenever possible to provide counsel to us.

Michael Lichter, Friend of ICT Since 2009



Thirty years after a trip to Nepal left him vowing to visit Tibet someday, Michael Lichter finally went. A commercial photographer from Boulder, Colorado, he was familiar with Tibetan culture from the strong Tibetan community in his home city. But at the time of his travels in Nepal in the 1970s, it was simply too difficult to gain entry into Tibet.

The opportunity to travel to Tibet came in 2006, when his daughter was studying in Beijing. Before entering Tibet, Michael and his wife traveled in China. “I noticed speaking to Chinese

people that their interpretation of the Tibet situation was completely different from my understanding,” he remarked. “I found it very disturbing to think there can be such contradictory ways of telling history.”

When he entered Tibet, Michael met a guide he had arranged through a travel company in Boulder. His name was Migmar Dhondup. Over the course of 12 days of travel, Michael was struck not only by the beauty and magnitude of the mountainous landscape but also by the warmth and sincerity of his guide, who quickly became a friend.

“We had a set route, but sometimes we’d take shortcuts, and I remember one day we traveled across the mountains in a jeep through this incredible landscape, and the entire day we saw only one other human—a shepherd. So we stopped to greet him and share a drink.” The ability to befriend everyone from an American traveler to a Tibetan nomad was characteristic of Migmar.

On another occasion, they visited a Buddhist site on a mountainside. While performing the circumambulation, Michael’s wife became nervous about the heights. Migmar took her hand to lead her through the rough spots. “He was so caring,” Michael remembered. “We felt very close with him and bonded with him over the course of our travels up to the Nepal border.”

As they were leaving Tibet, however, Michael was faced with the harsh reality of life in the country. He watched a long line of Tibetans cowering in fear as Chinese border guards smacked their billy clubs into their hands aggressively. “It was an absolutely horrible sight—there was this sense of domination and power that was really magnified at the border crossing.”

A couple years later, in 2008, Michael heard about the protests happening in Lhasa, and a mutual friend let Michael know that Migmar had been arrested on charges of espionage.

“My understanding is that Migmar was caught taking pictures of the protests,” Michael said. “Taking photographs is something that I do every day, so that resonated for me. I thought to myself, he was sentenced to 14 years for *that*? The sadness of it...the waste of human energy and talent. And knowing what the conditions are like in their prisons...I just can’t imagine.”



Michael became a *Partner for Tibet* level member of the International Campaign for Tibet in 2009 out of concern for his friend Migmar. “I reached out to a number of organizations to try to find out more about his case, and I got the best response from ICT,” he said. “They have done everything they could to find out more about Migmar and to help him.”

Even as he travels the world on assignment as a photographer, Michael remembers the friend he met in 2006 and works to support Tibet. He holds out hope that Migmar will attain his freedom—and that someday all Tibetans will be free to practice their religion and sustain their culture for future generations.

Join Michael in his support of Migmar Dhondup and political prisoners like him by adding your name to the petition to Secretary of State Rex Tillerson on the next page.

To learn more about ICT’s Partner for Tibet program, contact Cynthia Hurst at 202-580-6775 or cynthia.hurst@savetibet.org.



SPEAK UP FOR MIGMAR DHONDUP

Urge Secretary of State Tillerson to Pressure China to Release Tibetan Political Prisoners

Migmar Dhondup was sentenced to 14 years in prison in 2008 for alleged “espionage” related to messages he sent to Tibetans in exile regarding the widespread protests of March 2008. Along with three others, he was accused of “collecting intelligence concerning the security and interests of the state and providing it to the Dalai clique,” which Chinese authorities blame for the 2008 protests.

Originally from Tingri (Chinese: Dingri), in Shigatse (Chinese: Xigaze), Tibet Autonomous Region, Migmar is a young man in his early thirties. He was educated in exile, speaks fluent English, and is a passionate environmental conservationist. Friends describe him as a great reader and a proud Tibetan who is knowledgeable about his culture and heritage. Prior to his arrest, he worked as a tour guide for Western tourists like Michael Lichter (see page 10) and did community development work for the Kunde Foundation, an NGO devoted to helping impoverished communities and building clinics in remote locations.

His exact whereabouts are unknown, and he has been held completely incommunicado for the past 9 years—likely suffering from torture, poor conditions, and lack of medical care, as other prisoners have experienced.

Migmar Dhondup deserves to go home. You can help secure his freedom by signing the petition below and returning it to ICT in the attached envelope for delivery to Secretary of State Rex Tillerson.

ICT is hoping to deliver thousands of petitions from members nationwide calling for Tibetan political prisoners and human rights in Tibet to be at the forefront of all engagements between the new administration and the Chinese government.

PLEASE CLIP HERE

PRIORITY PETITION *to* U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE REX TILLERSON

Secretary Tillerson,

Under Chinese rule, Tibetans risk their freedom and safety by performing harmless, everyday acts we take for granted in the U.S. Because Chinese authorities want to prevent the wider world from learning about the grave situation inside Tibet, Tibetans are often arrested and imprisoned for such acts as taking photographs and sending text messages.

Migmar Dhondup is one example of a talented young Tibetan sentenced to 14 years in prison after being charged with “espionage” for taking photos of the 2008 protests in Lhasa. He has not been heard from since 2008, and even his closest friends do not know where he is.

WE URGE YOU TO:

- Raise the case of Migmar Dhondup and the other Tibetan political prisoners with the Chinese government as a matter of urgency and call for their release;
- Call upon the Chinese government to address policies in Tibet that threaten the unique culture, religion, and identity of the Tibetan people;
- Keep Tibet at the forefront of your engagement with the Chinese government, in support of a China rooted in respect for universal human rights and freedom of expression.

Thank you,

Sign Here _____

Name _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

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To learn more, contact Brian Ahern at 202-580-6770 or brian.ahern@savetibet.org.



During his trip as part of the 2016 Tibetan Election Observation Mission to present the delegation's findings to the Tibetan Parliament in Exile, ICT President Matteo Mecacci shared via Facebook, "It was humbling and a great honor to be welcomed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala on March 10, the anniversary of the 1959 Tibetan uprising, when His Holiness was forced by the Chinese occupation to escape from Tibet."