



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

After 20+ years in jail, Tibetan sentenced to 18 more years after demonstrating for world peace

<http://www.savetibet.org/after-20-years-in-jail-tibetan-sentenced-to-18-more-years-after-demonstrating-for-world-peace/>

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A Tibetan man who carried out a solo protest for world peace shortly after being released from more than 20 years in prison has been sentenced to another 18 years in a case described as a “state secret.”

Lodoe Gyatso—also known as Sogkhar Lodoe Gyatso because of his home area of Sog (Chinese: Suo) county, Nagchu (Chinese: Naqu), the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR)—is now in his mid-50s.

On the morning of Jan. 28, 2018, months after his release from a second two-year prison sentence, he published a video, broadcast by Voice of America, announcing his intention to hold a peaceful demonstration that would start his “campaign for world peace.”¹

Later that day, dressed in a white traditional Tibetan garment known as a chuba and a shirt, he was detained by police while marching around the Potala Palace carrying out his demonstration.

His wife, Gakyi, has also been sentenced to two years in jail, according to sources.

State secret

According to information received in the last few days by a relative in Dharamsala, India, Lodoe was sentenced to 18 years in prison in October or November 2018, without his family and friends being informed.

When asked about the case by Voice of America, an official at the People's Middle Court in Nagchu prefecture in the TAR said: "This is something that is a state secret. Even if I knew about this case, I would not be able to tell you about it because this is something that is a state secret."

Ngawang Thapa, Lodoe's nephew and a member of the Tibetan Parliament in exile in Dharamsala, told the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) that in his demonstration, Lodoe called for world peace and peace in Tibet, not even mentioning Tibetan freedom or independence. He is believed to have mentioned the presence of military troops in Tibet.

In the video made before his demonstration, Lodoe draws attention to Tibet's history of nonviolence, saying: “For thousands of years, we have worked for world peace through peaceful means and

¹ Voice of America (VOA), 5 April 2019, ‘Tibet Dissident’s Long Jail Sentence Called ‘State Secret’, <https://www.voanews.com/a/tibet-dissident-long-jail-sentence-called-state-secret-4863859.html>.

Middle Way approach, based on the principle of interdependence and nonviolent behavior, an example is the vision of Gyalwa Tenzin Gyatso [the Dalai Lama].”

Protest in prison

Lodoe carried out his first political protest in the Tibetan capital of Lhasa’s Drapchi (Tibet Autonomous Region Prison) in 1995. At the time, he was two years into a 15-year prison term for killing a man armed with a gun who had attacked him in a fight.² During his incarceration, he met various political prisoners and was inspired to protest inside prison.

In his lone demonstration, Lodoe shouted slogans such as “Tibet is independent!” “China should leave Tibet!” “Long live His Holiness the Dalai Lama!” and “All the 6 million Tibetans are united!” He also distributed handwritten pamphlets and posters that read: “Tibetans have been under Chinese rule for 36 years and on this day, to commemorate the Tibetan independence struggle, I represent the entire Tibetan people.”³

In response to his protest, Lodoe was tortured severely and reportedly sentenced to death.⁴ Ngawang Thapa said: “It is astonishing that he survived. He was held in a sort of iron cage inside the prison that was too small for him to stand or raise his head. He couldn’t walk properly afterwards. Other prisoners commented about the extreme treatment—it seems they really tried to kill him.”

Another Tibetan in exile told Radio Free Asia that: “At one point he was hung from a ceiling all night with nails driven through his thumbs.”⁵

It was later established that Lodoe had been held in a special punishment unit in Drapchi known as Detention Area Nine. The unit appears to have become operational in late summer 2000 with a total of 24 cells, two of which were used for solitary confinement. Conditions in this unit were the harshest in the prison.⁶

Death sentence commuted

News of Lodoe’s death sentence was smuggled out by fellow inmates and attracted international attention. In June 1995, the UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary and Arbitrary Executions transmitted an urgent appeal to the Chinese government.⁷

Following pressure from other international organizations, Lodoe’s sentence was commuted to life and he was deprived of political rights for three years.

² The man had apparently attacked Lodoe’s sister, according to his family. The Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy gives background in its report on May 31, 2016, at: <http://tchrd.org/former-tibetan-political-prisoner-released-from-prison-after-21-years-detained-again-three-years-later/>

³ TCHRD stated that Lodoe Gyatso carried out his protest walking from Block (Rukhag) no. 5 to 6, 4, 2 at Drapchi, concluding his protest march near the courtyard of Block 1. TCHRD report, May 31, 2016, <http://tchrd.org/former-tibetan-political-prisoner-released-from-prison-after-21-years-detained-again-three-years-later/>

⁴ Report by the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, 25 January 1996, United Nations Commission on Human Rights, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G96/103/98/PDF/G9610398.pdf?OpenElement>, page 29-30.

⁵ Radio Free Asia report, May 31, 2016, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/vanishes-05312016154810.html>

⁶ Takna Jigme Zangpo, the elderly school-teacher who served a total of 32 years in prison before his release on medical parole in March 2002, was held in the block for most of his last eight months of detention as a result of a protest he made at Drapchi in August 2001. Inmates held there also included two Tibetan criminal prisoners, Tringa and Sonam Tsewang, who were involved in political protests during and after the visit of a United Nations delegation to Drapchi prison in Lhasa in October 1997. Tibet Information Network report, August 16, 2002, reproduced by ICT, ‘Chinese authorities build new punishment block at Drapchi prison’, <https://www.savetibet.org/chinese-authorities-build-new-punishment-block-at-drapchi-prison/>

⁷ Report by the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, 25 January 1996, United Nations Commission on Human Rights, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G96/103/98/PDF/G9610398.pdf?OpenElement>, page 29.

He was finally released in 2013. His latter years of imprisonment were spent at Chushur (Chinese: Qushui) prison, on the road to Shigatse (Chinese: Rigaze).

Ngawang Thapa said: “Before his imprisonment, Lodoe Gyatso had been very fit; he was a member of a dance troupe and he participated in sports. He always used to win weight lifting competitions. In Drapchi, he was almost broken. When he was transferred to Chushur, he was able to do some basic exercise and build up some strength again.”

Imprisoned again

In 2015 and 2016, just years after his release from prison in 2013, Lodoe carried out two further protests, both resulting in imprisonment.

In one protest, he was believed to be making a stand against Tibetans being forced to wear wild animal pelts, which the Dalai Lama has said makes him feel ashamed.⁸

According to Ngawang Thapa, Lodoe also complained about the injustice of Tibetan monks and nuns being expelled from Lhasa monasteries and returned home to eastern Tibet. Thriving religious life in Tibet depended on the ability of Tibetan monastics to study in the great monasteries—equivalent to universities—in Lhasa and elsewhere, which had been particularly restricted by Chinese authorities since a crackdown on widespread protests in Tibet in 2008.

Lodoe’s current whereabouts and welfare are unknown. His family members fear he is in great danger, given that he is perceived as a strong supporter of Tibetan identity who has demonstrated continued defiance and determination even when near-death.

Said Ngawang Thapa: “It is almost beyond belief that, knowing what he did about the treatment he would receive again in prison, he was determined to make a further peaceful protest.”

ICT Statement

The International Campaign for Tibet calls for the immediate and unconditional release of Lodoe Gyatso, as he is imprisoned solely because of peacefully expressing his opinion. Additionally, his wife, Gakyi, must be released immediately and unconditionally if she has been detained solely for being Lodoe’s wife or because she peacefully expressed her opinions. Furthermore, the authorities must disclose the whereabouts of Lodoe and Gakyi and allow them to have access to legal representation and members of their family, as well as, if needed, appropriate medical care.

⁸ There has been a cultural shift in Tibet against wearing wild animal pelts since the Dalai Lama spoke against this in 2006, sparking the burning of furs across Tibet. While this was described by conservationists as one of the single most successful initiatives against the illegal wildlife trade, the Chinese authorities responded in some areas by encouraging, or requiring, Tibetans to wear wild animal pelts in order to showcase ‘exotic’ Tibetan culture, in some cases as a deliberate political statement against the Dalai Lama. International Campaign for Tibet report, ‘Online outrage over officials at Party meeting in Tibet wearing endangered animal furs’, January 23, 2015, <https://www.savetibet.org/online-outrage-over-officials-at-party-meeting-in-tibet-wearing-endangered-animal-furs/>