



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

UN Special Rapporteurs ask China for information about nine Tibetans imprisoned for celebrating Dalai Lama's 80th birthday

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Five UN Special Rapporteurs have written to the Chinese government requesting information about a group of Tibetans arrested for celebrating the Dalai Lama's 80th birthday.

The officials' letter also voices concerns about China's disregard of due process, its [criminalization of Tibetan self-expression](#) and its use of charges of "separatism" to violate Tibetans' basic rights.

"We deeply regret [the Chinese government's] response to what appears to be a cultural and religious expression by the nine members of the Tibetan minority," the document says, "and we are concerned over the reportedly frequent application of article 103 (2) of the Chinese Criminal Law on 'incitement to separatism' to suppress freedom of expression, religion, assembly and association and the cultural rights of the Tibetan minority, as well as to quash any human rights advocacy with regard to the protection and promotion of these rights."

The letter is signed by Karima Bennoune, Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights; David Kaye, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; Michel Forst, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; Fernand de Varennes, Special Rapporteur on minority issues; and Ahmed Shaheed, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief.

Nine sentenced to prison

Tibet, a historically independent country, has lived under a [brutal Chinese occupation since the Dalai Lama was forced into exile 60 years ago](#) in the face of credible threats to his life.

In [December 2016](#), the nine Tibetans from Ngaba (Chinese: Aba) in the Tibetan region of Amdo (which China considers part of its province of Sichuan) were sentenced to prison for their involvement in celebrating the [Dalai Lama's](#) 80th birthday in July 2015, including by organizing outdoor picnics and sharing information on social media.

Little is known about their trials, but it has been reported that the charges against them were likely related to 'separatism,' that they were denied legal assistance and that their families were not notified of the criminal proceedings against them.

According to the letter from the UN officials, the nine Tibetans are:

- **Drugdra** (also known as Dukda or Drukdra), a senior monk at the Kirti monastery in Ngaba, which has faced repeated crackdowns from Chinese authorities since 2008. Drugdra was sentenced to 14 years in prison at age 50 and is believed to be serving his term at Mianyang prison near Chengdu in Sichuan province, where his health is reportedly deteriorating. To date, his family has not been allowed to visit him.
- **Lobsang Khedrub**, a Kirti monk, who was nearing completion of his Geshe degree, the highest scholarly achievement for a Tibetan monk. He was sentenced to 13 years in jail at age 44; his whereabouts have remained unknown since his arrest.
- **Lobsang Gephel**, a Kirti monk, who was sentenced to 12 years in prison at age 29. Though his location has been unknown since he was arrested, reports indicate he might be serving his term at a labor camp in Mianyang prison.
- **Lodro**, a Kirti monk, who was sentenced to nine years in prison at age 41 after being held incommunicado for a year. Lodro's whereabouts are reportedly unknown.
- **Ta're Kyi**, who was arrested alongside her husband, then sentenced to eight years in prison for organizing celebrations of the Dalai Lama's birthday and offering help to the families of Tibetan [self-immolators](#). Ta're Kyi is allegedly in detention in Mianyang prison.
- **Bonkho Kyi** (also known as Wonkho Kyi), whose whereabouts have been unknown since her arrest. No information is known about the charges against her.
- **Trotsik Tsultrim**, a former monk of Trotsik monastery, who was sentenced to six years in prison. His whereabouts are believed to be unknown.
- **Tsultrim** (also known as Tsulte), a former Kirti monk, who was sentenced to six years in prison at age 32.
- **Akyakya**, a former Kirti monk, who was sentenced to five years in prison at age 35. Akyakya's whereabouts are allegedly unknown.

All nine had also allegedly been arrested in the past, with several of them accused of 'separatism' and taking part in protests.

Lobsang Khedrub was arrested in 2011 and released early in 2012, allegedly on account of the ill health he suffered due to torture and severe mistreatment in prison. Lobsang Khedrub's family was forced to bear the cost of his medical treatment.

None of the nine appear to have filed appeals of their convictions, allegedly in part due to fears of retaliation from Chinese authorities.

Concerns raised, information requested

In their letter, the Special Rapporteurs say they are deeply concerned about the "reported complete absence of judicial due process" in the cases of the nine Tibetans, as well as the lack of information about the locations and conditions of their detention.

The letter also expresses major concern about Chinese authorities using surveillance, intimidation and harassment against “all those Tibetan religious institutions and monasteries, which are not considered as being amenable to [g]overnment policies.” Under its current leadership, [China is attempting to “Sinicize” Tibetan Buddhism](#), meaning to place the entire religion under the full control of the Chinese Communist Party.

The letter includes eight requests from the Special Rapporteurs for detailed information about the nine prisoners, the charges against them, their wellbeing and more.

The requests also include a question about what steps China has taken to ensure Tibetans’ [“rights](#) to freedom of opinion and expression, religion or belief, liberty and security, equality before the law, as well as their right to take part in cultural life without discrimination.”

The Special Rapporteurs say any response they receive from China will be made publicly available.

International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) quote

Kai Mueller, head of ICT’s UN advocacy team and executive director of ICT Germany:

“For too long, the Chinese government has sought to eradicate Tibetans’ unique culture and force Tibetans to assimilate through the use of unfounded criminal accusations. The cases of these nine Tibetans, who were sentenced to prison simply for celebrating the birthday of their revered spiritual leader and a man who has won the Nobel Peace Prize and is respected around the world, illustrates the point perfectly.

“The International Campaign for Tibet is grateful to the five UN Special Rapporteurs for taking the significant step of publicizing the absurd charges against these nine Tibetans and pressuring China to account for their arrests and current conditions. China is continuing to hold these innocent Tibetans in prison and will be responsible for whatever happens to them. The international community must continue to push China until all Tibetan political prisoners are released, and the Tibetan people are once more allowed to practice their religion and culture freely.”

[Read the letter from the UN Special Rapporteurs.](#)