

## FIRST MEETING FOR EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT'S TIBET INTEREST GROUP SINCE ELECTIONS

THE FIRST MEETING OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT'S TIBET INTEREST GROUP (TIG) SINCE A NEW PARLIAMENT WAS ELECTED TOOK PLACE ON 22 JANUARY IN BRUSSELS. A NUMBER OF NEW MEMBERS SHOWED A STRONG MOTIVATION TO BE ACTIVE SUPPORTERS OF THE TIBETAN PEOPLE WITHIN THE PARLIAMENT.



Some of the participants at the Tibet Interest Group meeting in the European Parliament on 22 January 2020.

The meeting, which brought together around 15 Members of the European Parliament or their assistants as well as the Representative of the Dalai Lama in Brussels and the International Campaign for Tibet's Brussels team, began with an introduction by MEP Molly Scott Cato, a long-term member of the TIG who generously led the group during the transition period. She welcomed participants and highlighted some of the TIG's activities over the years before encouraging them to continue its good work. Cato, a British MEP, will soon be leaving the Parliament, as her

mandate will end on 31 January when Britain leaves the European Union.

Cato then gave the floor to MEP Mikulas Peksa, who was unanimously nominated as the new president of the group. Peksa, a Greens/European Free Alliance MEP from the Czech Pirate Party, explained that in the face of the threats currently posed by the Chinese authoritarian regime, the Tibetan struggle for human rights and freedom is

> CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



### IN THIS ISSUE

- 1 First meeting for European Parliament's Tibet Interest Group since elections
- 2 The Dalai Lama should reincarnate following traditional Tibetan practices, Tibetan religious leaders say
- 3 More than 30 Tibetans imprisoned after protests in Sershul
- 4 Tibetan students ordered not to take part in religious activities during winter break
- 5 Former monk dies after self-immolating
- 6 New 'defense' villages and infrastructure being built on Tibet's border
- 7 Political Prisoner Focus
- 8 Reading Suggestions
- 9 Upcoming Events
- 10 ICT's 2020 calendar: Glimpses into a life of wisdom



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## THE DALAI LAMA SHOULD REINCARNATE FOLLOWING TRADITIONAL TIBETAN PRACTICES, TIBETAN RELIGIOUS LEADERS SAY

IN NOVEMBER LAST YEAR, SENIOR TIBETAN RELIGIOUS LEADERS ADOPTED A RESOLUTION URGING THE DALAI LAMA TO REINCARNATE ACCORDING TO TIBETAN TRADITIONS. THEY DECLARED THAT TIBETANS WOULD NEVER ACCEPT A DALAI LAMA APPOINTED BY CHINA.



The Dalai Lama concluding teachings at Bodhgaya, Bihar in India, on 6 January. (Photo: Tenzin Choejor).

The resolution that emerged at the 14<sup>th</sup> Tibetan Religious Conference – an event organized every three years by the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) and brings together heads of major Tibetan Buddhist and Bon traditions – also says the Dalai Lama alone has the authority to decide how his reincarnation will occur and that no government has the right to interfere in that sacred process.

The current Dalai Lama is the 14<sup>th</sup> in his line. Each Dalai Lama is recognized as the reincarnation of their predecessors, and, according to Tibetan Buddhist beliefs, has the sole authority to decide whether to return after death in order to benefit humankind. Using this authority, the Dalai Lama issued a [statement in 2011](#) saying that Tibetans and followers of Tibetan Buddhism should decide whether or not to continue the institution of

the Dalai Lama after his death.

Despite this, China has made it clear it plans to appoint its own successor to the Dalai Lama, who will no doubt serve as a mouthpiece for the regime in Beijing, just as the Chinese-appointed Panchen Lama does. China's plans not only represent a major violation of international religious freedom but, given the Dalai Lama's massive popularity around the globe, would also help the Communist Party's efforts to use soft power to influence and undermine foreign countries.

Thankfully, however, some governments have expressed support for the Tibetans' right to select their own religious leaders. In the US, a new bill was introduced in Congress late last year that makes it official US policy that the succession of the Dalai Lama is something only he and the Tibetan

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more relevant than ever. He urged that the support of policymakers worldwide for Tibet remains of crucial importance.

A number of MEPs then reaffirmed their support for the Tibetan people and their readiness to actively contribute to the group's activities, and Tashi Phuntsok of the Office of Tibet suggested some events the group could organize this year. ICT's EU Policy Director Vincent Metten also welcomed the new members of the group and its president, and offered ICT's support for the group's activities. He underlined the importance of the upcoming year for EU-China relations and announced that ICT's [Tibet Lobby Days](#) would take place in Brussels in March and encouraged the MEPs to meet with the participants.

Buddhist community can decide on. The bill, known as the [Tibetan Policy and Support Act](#), will also sanction Chinese officials who attempt to appoint a future Dalai Lama. In an 11 November communication to the Dutch Parliament, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, Stef Blok, also stated his government policy that "*it is up to the Tibetan religious community to appoint a future successor to the Dalai Lama.*" And during a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Belgian House of Representatives on 21 January, Belgium's Minister for Foreign Affairs Philippe Goffin [said](#) "*Concerning the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama as a religious leader and on the basis of the principle of freedom of religion, it is logically up to the Tibetan religious community to designate his successor without interference from the temporal authorities*". ICT hopes that this will inspire other governments to adopt and express similar support for the right of Tibetan Buddhist communities to select, educate and install their religious leaders, such as preeminent Tibetan Buddhist lamas like the Dalai Lama, without government interference.

## MORE THAN 30 TIBETANS IMPRISONED AFTER PROTESTS IN SERSHUL

MORE THAN 30 TIBETAN MONKS AND LAYPEOPLE WERE IMPRISONED FOR TWO WEEKS IN A HARSH CRACKDOWN IN SERSHUL (CHINESE: SHIQU) IN EASTERN TIBET, FOLLOWING THE ARREST OF SEVEN TIBETANS THERE FOR PROTESTS IN NOVEMBER.



The main street of Wonpo, in Sershul, in late November following the protests and crackdown.

The more than 30 local people were held in the town's detention center from around 21 November to 12 December, according to new information from Jampa Yonten, a former monk from Dza Wonpo monastery who now lives in exile. Conditions in detention were harsh, and the Tibetans were given only tsampa (roasted barley flour) to eat. According to the same source, the detained Tibetans fell under police suspicion for reasons such as keeping images of the Dalai Lama, having contacts with Tibetans outside Tibet, or demonstrating an uncooperative attitude toward officials. At the same time, Chinese troops in riot gear held intimidating military drills in the town, which is located in Kardze (Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan province. According to the source, local people's homes were searched and their cellphones checked by authorities, with an unknown number interrogated by police and public security officials. Tibetans in the town were also warned by officials that they would not be allowed to participate in the future in any "political" activities – a term officials can interpret as they see fit.

These arrests follow the [detention of seven](#)

[Tibetans after two separate protests in November calling for Tibetan independence and the return of the Dalai Lama](#). The protests were sparked by distressing political campaigns imposed on local nomads, whom the Chinese government had forced to give up their land and livelihoods. Many were also ordered to remove images of the Dalai Lama and replace them with pictures of Chinese leaders, and to praise the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). At the beginning of January, all seven Tibetans were still in custody, and their families and friends have been refused permission to see them.

According to Jampa Yonten, who is in touch with other Tibetans well informed about the situation in the area, armed soldiers in riot gear held intimidating military drills in the town following the protests. This more overt military presence is believed to have been scaled back after 12 December. Images of the town show emptied streets and the presence of troops following the crackdown. "The place has become like a ghost town," said Jampa Yonten, who added that local people were frightened to leave their homes on account of the intense crackdown.

## TIBETAN STUDENTS ORDERED NOT TO TAKE PART IN RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES DURING WINTER BREAK

AS SCHOOLS IN THE TIBETAN CAPITAL OF LHASA BEGAN THEIR WINTER VACATIONS THIS WEEK, PARENTS RECEIVED ORDERS SAYING THEIR CHILDREN MUST NOT BE INVOLVED IN ANY RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES DURING THE BREAK.

In one such directive, dated 31 December and sent by Lhasa Chengguan Haicheng Elementary School, parents were told that it is the order of the Education Department that during the winter vacation, students cannot participate in any religious activities, nor can the parents "take them to faraway places". It says parents will be responsible for any consequences that result.

Prohibitions on children's participation in religious activities in Tibet were also announced during previous [summer](#) and [winter](#) vacations in 2018 and 2019. Additionally, Radio Free Asia reported that in May 2018, Chinese authorities in Tibet's Chamdo (Chinese: Changdu) city [ordered Tibetan students and their parents to avoid religious gatherings and festivals](#) during the Buddhist holy month of Saga Dawa (the fourth month that marks the anniversary of the Buddha's conception, enlightenment and death), threatening them with unspecified punishment if they ignored the ban.

The International Campaign for Tibet maintains that by banning schoolchildren from religious activities, Chinese authorities are infringing upon basic principles of freedom of religion, as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – which China agreed to – and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which China ratified in 1992.

## FORMER MONK DIES IN NGABA AFTER SELF-IMMOLATING

A YOUNG TIBETAN FORMER MONK FROM KIRTI MONASTERY SET HIMSELF ALIGHT ON 26 NOVEMBER AND DIED IN NGABA (CHINESE: ABA) TIBETAN AND QIANG AUTONOMOUS PREFECTURE, SICHUAN, IN THE TIBETAN AREA OF AMDO.



An image of Yonten shared by Kirti monks in exile.

Despite intense restrictions that Chinese authorities have placed on sharing information with the outside world, images reached Tibetans in exile of 24-year-old Yonten, alone and ablaze on a road somewhere in the pastoral area of Me'uruma, Ngaba. This is where the wave of Tibetan self-immolations began in 2009 when Kirti monk Tapey walked out of his monastery and set himself on fire.

Since then, there have been 156 Tibetan self-immolations in Tibet and China, including Yonten's. Chinese authorities have responded to this wave by intensifying security measures to a stifling degree and strengthening the policies and measures that are the root cause of the acts, such as aggressive campaigns against the Dalai Lama. Authorities have also taken violent retributive actions against families, relatives or monasteries associated with those who have self-immolated, which has created a vicious spiral of deeper oppression.

According to two Kirti monks living in exile, Kanyag Tsering and Lobsang Yeshe, Yonten joined Kirti monastery when he was very young and later returned to lay life and worked as a pastoralist.

## NEW 'DEFENSE' VILLAGES AND INFRASTRUCTURE BEING BUILT ON TIBET'S BORDER

CHINA HAS ACCELERATED CONSTRUCTION OF NEW "BORDER DEFENSE VILLAGES" IN TIBET THIS YEAR AS PART OF THE FAR-REACHING AGENDA OF PRESIDENT XI JINPING TO CREATE AN ADVANCED, IMPENETRABLE "SECURITY BARRIER" BETWEEN TIBET AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD.



An image from Chinese state media shows a family moving into a house in Demchog, a new "xiaogang" border defense village, in August 2019.

Speaking at a press conference in Beijing in September, Wu Yingjie, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) chief of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), said "Tibet is a special frontier ethnic region" and "an important national security and ecological security barrier." Wu's comment reflects Chinese authorities' increasing emphasis on infrastructure development and militarization on the borders of Tibet, as outlined by President Xi Jinping at a panel discussion at the first session of the 12<sup>th</sup> National People's Congress in March 2013: *"To govern the country well we must first govern the frontiers well, and to govern the frontiers well, we must first ensure stability in Tibet."*

According to the "Plan for the Construction of Well-off Villages in the Border Areas of the Tibet Autonomous Region (2017-2020)," issued in 2017, more than 600 "well-off" (Chinese: xiaokang) border defense villages will be constructed – a construction that Wu (who also heads the Border Defense Committee of the TAR) recently said will be

accelerated. Chinese state media reported the plan to construct 624 such villages in Tibetan border areas (most of the construction is taking place in the key border areas of Nyingtri (Ch: Linzhi, also rendered in English by Chinese sources as Nyingchi) - which borders India's Arunachal Pradesh state - Ngari (Ch: Ali) and Shigatse (Ch: Rikaze). In a

move to counter "infiltration" by "hostile forces," such as Tibetans loyal to the Dalai Lama, and ensuring compliance with CCP objectives, CCP cadres, paid more than their counterparts elsewhere, will be transferred to each village. There have already been intensive political education sessions in border areas as part of efforts to undermine and eliminate the Dalai Lama's influence, such as the training of monks in Nyingtri, on countering "espionage activities by the Dalai Lama".

Chinese state media also announced the completion of a bridge and tunnel last month on the strategically important Lhasa to Nyingtri section of the "Sichuan-Tibet" railway, close to the border with India. Despite scientists' warnings of untold environmental consequences and risks of earthquakes and other disasters, its construction was considered a priority at the highest political levels in China. The Chinese government also announced it will start building three new airports in the TAR in 2019 (in addition to five currently there).

## POLITICAL PRISONER FOCUS

### ANYA SENGDRA SENTENCED TO PRISON



Tibetan nomad and community leader Anya Sengdra, in detention since September 2018 (see [Tibet Brief edition 67 – January 2019](#)), was sentenced last December to seven years in prison. According to his lawyer, he is currently suffering from poor health, and will appeal the judgment.

Anya Sengdra, 47, was sentenced on 6 December by the Gade (Chinese: Gande) County court in Golog (Guoluo), Qinghai province in the Tibetan area of Amdo. He has been a staunch campaigner against government corruption, criticizing local officials for siphoning off funds and the misuse of public money, notably from relocated nomads. He also has campaigned against illegal mining activities and the hunting and poaching of endangered animals. Following his arrest in September 2018, he was beaten and held without access to a lawyer for his first 48 days in detention. His wife and other family members were not permitted to see him. In sentencing Anya Sengdra, the court apparently invoked the Chinese government's politically motivated campaign

against “black” and “evil forces.” While this is a nationwide campaign, it has been intensified in Tibet with a strong emphasis on cracking down on “separatism in the name of religion” and loyalty to the Dalai Lama.

Lin Qilei, Anya Sengdra's lawyer, [told Radio Free Asia's Tibetan Service](#) on 9 December that the verdict will not be accepted and there will be an appeal. He said he was waiting to receive the written verdict in order to review the case and to decide on the next step. According to Chinese laws, an individual has the right to file an appeal within 10 days of the judgment. Lin also spoke about Anya's health condition, revealing that he has high blood pressure and the medical treatment given to him in the detention center has not been effective.

The International Campaign for Tibet reiterates its call for the immediate release of Anya Sengdra, who has been detained solely for peacefully campaigning against corruption and expressing his criticism of government policies.

## READING SUGGESTIONS



### HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH'S WORLD REPORT 2020

China poses an “existential threat” to the international human rights system, according to Human Rights Watch. In its 2020 World Report's chapter on China, the rights group details the vast surveillance state created by the Chinese government in its efforts to achieve total social control and its attacks on human rights, including in Hong Kong, Xinjiang and

Tibet. But the report also highlights the threat to the global system for protecting human rights posed by the Chinese government under President Xi Jinping, and warns in particular about China's growing political influence and efforts to censor people abroad. “It's not simply a suppression at home, but it's attacks on virtually any body, company, government, international institution that tries to uphold human rights or hold Beijing to account,” HRW's executive director Kenneth Roth said. In January, he was denied entry to Hong Kong, where he had planned to launch the report. Read the report [here](#).

### REPURPOSING DEMOCRACY - THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT CHINA FRIENDSHIP CLUSTER, BY JICHANG LULU FOR SINOPSIS

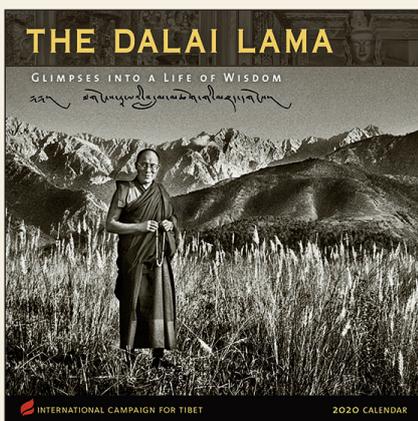
Party's influence tactics through a case study of the informal “China friendship group” in the European Parliament. “The group effectively functions as a proxy for CCP domestic and external propaganda,” the paper states. “In China, the presentation of statements by its members helps engineer the perception of a global endorsement of the party-state's rule; abroad, it conveys support for CCP initiatives through credible voices. A systematic overview of the group and its activities is presented here for the first time, along with its links to a wider network of CCP-aligned organizations that are best analyzed as constituting a cluster. The description of the cluster's interactions with its partner agencies across the CCP political influence apparatus is accompanied by brief overviews of these agencies, highlighting their role in other aspects of influence work.” An instructive insight into the links between some Members of the European Parliaments, European Parliament's groups and platforms, and the Chinese Communist-Party, the paper is available [here](#).



## UPCOMING EVENTS

- **24 FEBRUARY**  
Losar (Tibetan New Year)
- **24 FEBRUARY-20 MARCH**  
43<sup>rd</sup> session of the UN Human Rights Council
- **MARCH**  
Tibet Lobby Days in Washington DC (23-24 March [more information here](#)) and Brussels (16-19 March [more information here](#))
- **30-31 MARCH**  
EU-China Summit in Beijing (date to be confirmed)
- **15 APRIL**  
17+1 Summit in China (date to be confirmed)

## ICT'S 2020 CALENDAR: GLIMPSES INTO A LIFE OF WISDOM



His Holiness the Dalai Lama was born in Tibet in 1935. Chinese occupation of his homeland in 1959 forced him to flee into exile. In the six decades since he began his life as a refugee in Dharamsala, a small hill town in northern India, the Dalai Lama has worked for the welfare of the Tibetan people while evolving into a hugely respected international statesman and moral leader. This calendar features 12 photographs of the Dalai Lama by the renowned Indian photographer Raghu Rai, who has closely followed His Holiness's life. Today the Dalai Lama, who has retired from his Tibetan political leadership, devotes himself to promoting human values and religious

harmony while continuing to draw attention to the rich Tibetan Buddhist cultural heritage, which he feels has much to contribute to the development of world civilization. This calendar is a tribute to the Dalai Lama by the International Campaign for Tibet.

**BY PURCHASING THIS CALENDAR YOU IMMEDIATELY HELP ICT'S WORK IN CAMPAIGNING FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRATIC FREEDOMS IN TIBET.**

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